

IN THE SHADE



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TORONTO

1910

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1910

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Printed in Great Britain.

880121

IN THE SHADE

PART I

CHAPTER I

HENRIETTA HARRIS was acquitted of the charge of murdering her husband early in the spring of 1879, and she was again free to rejoin her family in the rooms they had taken in Ipswich for the time that the trial should last.

That evening, the evening upon which the verdict had been given, she was once more sitting with her father and mother and elder sister. Her chair was drawn up to the round table which stood in the centre of the lodging-house parlour under the three flaring gas-jets which hung from the ceiling. Her arms were resting on the sham Eastern table-cloth of many dingy colours, her slim hands lightly joined, their warm pallor contrasting with the hard, white, semi-transparent cuffs that bound the edge of her black sleeves. Opposite to her, over the mantelpiece, was a large gilt-framed mirror, and she could not raise her eyes in the slightest degree without seeing herself in the glass. Even, as from time to time she glanced towards her father or her mother who were sitting upon each side of the fireplace, she was aware of every reflected movement.

Mrs Harris was twenty-five, but she looked less. Her soft, fair hair was parted in the middle, and twisted into a knot at the nape of her neck. Her features were mobile with excitability. Her eyes, large, prominent and pale grey, were set far apart; her mouth, though prettily shaped, was a little too thin and a little too wide, accentuating the smallness of her pointed chin. Her chief beauty was the pure, smooth whiteness of her skin, so white that it formed a real contrast to her light hair and eyes.

As she sat there, doing nothing and saying nothing, the sensation that dominated all others in her was one of intense hurry. It seemed to her that she had had no time to feel even, no time to take in the full import of all that had been happening. The first check to her incoherent emotions came from the mute dejection of her relatives. She was nettled by their attitude of reserve towards her, and her irritation steadied her by its definiteness.

Why, any one might think they were not *glad*!

They were treating her like a child in disgrace. It was positively inhuman; and yet how like them! How like what they had always been! But what was more, it was absurd, for whatever came out against one during the progress of a trial counted for nothing after acquittal. Again, how like them to take nothing but the bare facts into consideration! After all, the utmost that had been proved against her had been folly, and surely there was ample excuse for her. What chance could there be, she asked herself, for a girl such as she, of strong feelings, impetuous, self-willed perhaps, but capable of Living and Doing, in a family of conventional, narrow-minded people who trimmed every thought and emotion to the standard of good-breeding? Henrietta likened herself to a wild bird in captivity.

And she had married to escape, but had only passed into another bondage. Bondage, indeed! How could

she ever have thought that life with John Harris could be tolerable? Of course he had had money, and he was out the greater part of every day, but then he had required an account of every penny she spent, and every evening he had harassed her with questions concerning her occupations, allowing her to omit no detail. How she had learnt to hate his pertinacious voice, and the mere sight of his lean, elderly, unsmiling face! How she had dreaded the dinner-hour, when she was forced to sit opposite him, and endure his habit of sniffing loudly and shortly every few minutes! She remembered, too, with a shudder, that he used to pick his teeth deliberately after each course, staring at her across the table with suspicious eyes while he did so. Good Heavens! Was such a man a fit husband for her? Was it much wonder if she did deceive him from time to time?

Besides . . . well, it did not often happen that the accused person in a trial was a woman, and young and pretty! A remote conviction, unformulated even to herself, that her appearance was appropriate to the heroine of a drama, somehow justified her in her own eyes.

Supposing even that Jessie had been in her place? She let her look rest upon her sister, who was sitting upon a low chair near their father, and, without acknowledging so crude a thought in words, she felt instinctively that Jessie Pottinger would not have had the same right to the excuses which she claimed for herself without hesitation.

Miss Pottinger was knitting a white shawl, her hands moving quickly at the edge of the soft crumpled woollen heap that filled her lap, while she gazed straight in front of her. Her dark hair, also done at the nape of her neck, was cut into a small straight fringe over her forehead; the firelight was flickering on her pale, pointed features.

Henrietta felt her sister's silence to be accusation, and she was fretted by a desire to defend herself, mingled with a vague impression that it was unfair to perturb her *now* with any such feeling. She fixed her eyes upon Miss Pottinger with a sudden resentful intensity, and asserted her self-respect by criticising where she knew herself criticised.

Why should she care what Jessie thought? Jessie had always been the slave of appearances. She had never understood. None of them had ever understood. If they only knew how largely they were responsible, what would they say then? But Jessie, at any rate, could never take in any such idea. And the mere fact that she could go on with that everlasting knitting at such a moment showed how little she was capable of understanding a sensitive character.

It was strange, indeed, that she should have been involved in any way in a great drama, though only by relationship with the principal actor.

"She has been brushed by the edge of the whirlwind," thought Henrietta. "And in her particular world, even a breeze is in bad taste."

That, of course, was what disturbed them all so gravely. Nothing had ever happened to them before, and according to their ideal of life nothing ought to happen.

Her eyes sought her reflection in the glass; they were shining with excitement.

How different she was from Jessie! And not only from Jessie, but from her father and mother. By what accident did she come to be born of such parents? She glanced curiously first at one, and then the other.

Mrs Pottinger looked older than her age. She was small and dowdily spruce. Her hair was grey, and her face, marked by straight wrinkles across the forehead, was the colour and texture of parchment. Her

eyes, like Henrietta's, were prominent and light grey, but their colour was faded, and unlike her daughter's rather slow glance, their expression behind her spectacles was inquisitive, quick, and obstinate. Just now, her eyelids were lowered, and her look fixed upon the fender. Her mouth was set in a firm line, drooping at the corners. She was wearing a white lace cap, high in front, and adorned with a black velvet bow.

Mr Pottinger sat opposite to her, holding himself very upright, each hand spread upon each knee. He was a round-faced, red-faced man, stout and of middle height. His lower lip protruded in front of the upper; his mouth and chin were clean-shaven, but he wore small grey whiskers. His eye-brows were very short, being scarcely more than stiff tufts of hair, puckered close together by a deep, permanent frown. At this moment he appeared to be extremely uneasy; from time to time he raised one hand passing it over his bald forehead and face, and replacing it on his knee, and as often as he did so, he cleared his throat with a rasping sound and a brusque puffing out of his lips.

It occurred to Henrietta that what was really afflicting him was the want of a newspaper, and she nearly laughed aloud. Really, it was too funny! She was acquitted, and yet he could not bring himself even to read that she was declared "Not guilty," because she was his daughter! Just as if there were any real degradation in the mere fact of having one's name in the paper!

She wondered how much had been reported, and what comments had been made, and she determined with some eagerness to get hold of the back numbers of the *Telegraph*, turning over in her mind ways and means of :—uring them without Jessie's knowledge. She did not stop to consider why she did not

wish Jessie to know. In her heart of hearts she was ashamed, but she again persuaded herself that Miss Pottinger was unsympathetic.

Certainly, it was an added trouble for a heroine when her immediate audience neither approved nor believed in her. She could not remember that the attitude of near relatives to the heroine as shown in novels had ever been the least like this; particularly when the drama in which she was concerned was one of public knowledge and interest. If, as in her case, the dreariness of home surroundings had driven the heroine to desperate deeds, it was always brought home to the parents in the end, and she felt impatiently that this moment of her acquittal was *the* moment for the great scene of tenderness and reconciliation.

How stupid they were! How commonplace! She looked away from her father in vexation, and necessarily caught sight of herself again in the glass; her eyes paused then, and she scrutinised herself with interest.

She had grown thinner, and no wonder, considering all she had been through! Of course, she really had known at the bottom of her heart that they could not find her guilty. In fact, it was so difficult to realise what conviction would have meant, that she almost persuaded herself that it had been impossible. It was extraordinary enough that she should have been accused at all! Nevertheless, at the recollection of the shock of that moment she experienced a qualm of such paralysing terror that her brain reeled, and for a moment physical dizziness blinded her.

When the mist cleared again from her sight, she found herself staring with fixed, horror-stricken eyes at the reflection of her white face.

It had been ghastly! She had felt then that

if they once . . . such as suspected her, the truth must be discovered, and it seemed marvellous to her now that she had not given up all hope of escape and confessed then and there.

How had she had presence of mind to deny, and be consistent in her denial? She was amazed at her own promptness and strength of character. What if, in that moment of panic, she had given herself away, as she might so easily have done? And how many girls in her place would not have broken down during the trial? Several times she had almost cried aloud that she could keep it up no longer, and. . . .

Would they indeed have hanged her?

Every sensation in her remained numb before this possibility. She had an impression of gazing futilely at black, featureless fog, which no sight could penetrate, and the unimaginable horror of it petrified her.

With a shudder, she forced her attention upon the actual facts.

That was all over. There was no peril threatening her now. She was safe. Safe and free. Doubly free, for John Harris was no longer there to plague her.

He was gone! Dead! That again was so difficult to realise.

Dead? And she felt no regret! Yet why should she? She had disliked him; his habits had disgusted, and his tyranny had galled her.

Still she not only felt no regret, but she felt no dismay at what she had done, and her own callousness both surprised and worried her a little. Heroines generally gave vent to passionate emotion at all crises, and she felt that her own attitude required explanation.

As she pondered over John Harris's last weeks of life, she perceived that she somehow could not connect his death with her action. She had hoped

that the poison would kill him, but she had not believed that it could really have any effect on him, and she had remained sceptical, even when she saw that he was becoming seriously ill. If she had stuck a knife into him, she would have known then that she had killed him, and probably would have experienced both horror and remorse.

But as it was, a cause of death so secret, so slow, appeared too remote from its result to be credible.

When other people suspected her, she had believed to some extent in her own guilt, but now that she was acquitted it seemed to her that any other sentence would have been monstrously unjust.

Yes, she was free ; but free from what ? She would have to adjust herself to completely new circumstances. The first story of her life was finished ; anything that happened now would belong to another tale, though to the same heroine. She was thrilled by the vague possibilities of the future ; she made sure of winning every one's love and admiration, even the approbation of her parents and sister.

"Oh, but they *are* unkind !" she thought angrily.

What was she to do if they were going to treat her like this ? Of course, she was really independent—John Harris had left her about seven hundred pounds a year—she could simply pack up her trunks and leave them. But she did not want to live alone. She hated being by herself. Besides, it would not look well—especially now. People might say things. . . .

But if they were going to make her life a burden to her, there would be nothing else to do. Perhaps they would rather she had been hanged ?

Good God ! The horror of it ! It would always haunt her now ! She would never dare to go to bed and face the misery of dreaming, the misery of lying awake in the dark, *thinking* as she had thought during these past nights.

If only some one would be kind to her, and make much of her! What use was it to be interesting to people with whom one never came in touch? And what consolation was *their* interest for the coldness of those near one? It was the people one knew that mattered. All her excitement went stale, and she was possessed by a feeling of profound disillusionment. The whole drama seemed sordid and flat. She wished that it had not happened. She still did not feel responsible, but she wished that nothing had happened. She was tired, and she wanted sympathy. If only some one would treat her like a little child, and hold her hand and tell her that it was really all over!

She held out one hand across the table.

"Jessie," she said, uncertainly.

Her sister and father and mother all looked round. Miss Pottinger stopped knitting, but she did not take Henrietta's hand, nor did she speak at once.

Mrs Harris started to her feet.

"Oh!" she cried furiously. "Why don't you say something? Are you made of stone? Haven't I suffered enough without your——. Don't you understand that I am acquitted? And that if I hadn't been—I—I——"

She broke off, pressing her lips together to keep back the tears that filled her eyes, and she turned round towards her mother.

Two drops emerged from the corners of Mrs Pottinger's eyes, and rolled quickly down her cheeks.

"You need not reproach us, Henrietta," she said in her dry, monotonous voice, and she swallowed a convulsive sob. "We are giving thanks"—she gulped again—"it has been an unspeakable mercy, but——"

Mr Pottinger clenched both his fists, and thumped them upon his knees.

"You—you—you have brought disgrace on us

all!" he shouted, and Henrietta glanced at him in alarm.

Jessie rose, and gathering up her knitting, she laid it on the table.

"Mother, don't you think Henrietta ought to go to bed?" she said. "It is getting late, and——"

Henrietta laughed angrily.

"How like you, Jessie," she said. "Do you really think I could go to sleep?"

Jessie took note of her quietly.

"I will give you some bromide," she decided. "Come, it would be much better to bring this evening to an end. And there is a great deal to be settled and considered to-morrow."

Henrietta sat down again.

"But why to-morrow? Why not now?" she said defiantly. "And why bring this evening to an end? I don't see it."

"My dear Henrietta——" began Jessie.

"You have hearts of stone!" cried Henrietta. "You don't care for me! You never have! All this would never have happened if you had loved me."

"Silence!" roared Mr Pottinger.

Nobody spoke or moved.

Then Jessie cleared her throat, and Mr Pottinger swept his hand over his forehead and down over his nose and chin.

"I want to know what has got to be settled," said Henrietta obstinately.

Nobody answered, and she eyed them sharply one after the other. She was troubled by an indefinable misgiving. What did they mean to do?

She sat still for a minute more, and then she rose abruptly.

"Good-night," she said, and she went quickly towards the door.

"Henrietta!" said Mrs Pottinger.

Mrs Harris paused.

"Come here, my daughter," said her mother in her dry, expressionless voice.

Henrietta hesitated, and then walked back to the fireside.

"Kiss me, my child," said Mrs Pottinger. "God be thanked for His mercies to you!"

Henrietta sank on her knees, and flung her arms round her mother's neck, sobbing hysterically.

Jessie pinched her lips, and resumed her knitting, her eyes resolutely fixed upon her needies. Mr Pottinger uneasily coughed and fidgeted.

"Come, come!" murmured Mrs Pottinger. "Come, come."

Her thin, wrinkled hands, with their bent fingers, were resting upon her daughter's clinging arms, but she was scarcely holding her.

"Come, Henrietta," she said, with firmness. "You must control yourself. Jessie, take her upstairs."

CHAPTER II

THE fire was getting low, and Mr Pottinger bent forward to make it up. He sat upon the extreme edge of his chair, one leg extended backwards beneath it, the knee almost touching the floor, and he noisily shovelled some coals out of the scuttle, and let them slide into the grate. The glow was extinguished, and a thick yellow smoke hurried up the chimney. He put down the shovel, and seizing the poker he began to rake out the ashes between the bars, lifting the coals from beneath, but only succeeding in making the thick smoke thicker and more hurried. His red face looked sullen and angry, and at the same time heavily perplexed.

His wife gazed into the hearth in silence; she made no protest against the persistent noise that he was making. Since Henrietta had gone from the room, the severity of her expression had relaxed; her pallor had become almost grey, the lines on her face had deepened, and she sat very still, her head drooping, her shoulders rounded with an appearance of feebleness, of utter fatigue and dejection.

There had been a softening uncertainty in the gleam of the fire-light a little while ago, but now that was smothered, and the dreariness of the middle-aged man and woman was uncompromisingly revealed in the harsh, cheerless glare of the gas.

Neither Mr nor Mrs Pottinger spoke. Nor indeed

was either of them thinking, though the knowledge of past thoughts was with them like a scar. For the moment, they were simply waiting for Jessie to return.

She came into the room presently with a quiet, business-like alertness, and walking up to the fireplace she stood between her father and mother. She observed Mr Pottinger for a minute, and then said with gentle decision:

"De. father, you are doing no good with that poker."

"It's *all* right," he said testily. "It'll burn up directly."

Nevertheless he put the poker down in the fender and flung himself back in his chair.

Jessie turned her head towards Mrs Pottinger.

"Dear mother," she exclaimed under her breath, "you look absolutely worn out."

"Is *she* all right, my dear?" asked Mrs Pottinger, glancing almost furtively up at her daughter.

"Oh yes," said Jessie cheerfully. "I have given her a sedative. She was just over-wrought, you know——"

She stopped rather abruptly, conscious of the inadequacy of what she was saying.

But then there was nothing that one *could* say that was not inadequate, and, as a matter of fact, it was much better to reduce the situation as far as possible to mere commonplace detail. Indeed, how else could one refer to it at all? There was so much that was better ignored, that *had to be* ignored. If once one allowed oneself to speak openly, or even to think——

Jessie stood motionless, leaning against the table behind her, her eyes fixed and unseeing in her absorption.

What did her father and mother believe? Did they think as she could not help thinking? She

could not tell. It was impossible to find out. There were some questions it was not possible to put into words.

A distressed look came into her mother's face.

"I trust I was not unkind," she said. "I—I—It has been so shocking."

Jessie roused herself from her preoccupation.

"Thank God that it has ended as it has," she said with brisk fervour.

"Thank God, indeed!" responded Mrs Pottinger. "Oh, my dear, yes! Thank God!"

There was a short pause.

"I wonder——" began Jessie, but Mr Pottinger interrupted with surly anger.

"Ended, do you call it? It's not ended. She's brought disgrace upon us all. She's turned me out of my home, where I've lived all my life. I'm ashamed to look my friends in the face. I'm—I'm ashamed of my name. Nothing is left for me now but to call myself Brown or Jones, and go to live amongst people who don't care a twopenny damn *who I am.*"

He relapsed into silence, but neither Jessie nor her mother attempted to say anything in defence of Henrietta.

The smoke from the fire suddenly broke into flame. Jessie moved a step forward, and slightly lifting her skirt with one hand, she rested her foot on the fender to warm it.

"By the by," she said, glancing along the mantelpiece, "I put a list of houses that the agent sent up here. Did you see it? Oh, here it is." She took it from behind the clock.

She unfolded the sheet of paper and glanced quickly down the page, slowly extending it towards her mother as she did so. Then she looked up, and said:

"I have numbered them in the order in which I thought them promising."

Mrs Pottinger took the list and tried to read it, but tears filled her eyes and lodged upon her glasses.

She handed the paper without speaking to her husband.

He held it in a hand that shook in spite of being propped upon his knee. He cleared his throat, turned over the paper, and cleared his throat again.

"But—er—but this is all very well," he said testily, "but what—what's been arranged? What are you going to do? That's what I want to know. What are you going to do with her?"

"I—we thought——" began Mrs Pottinger. "We thought that Jessie might take her away——"

"I'm sure that is the wisest plan," interposed Jessie swiftly. "Indeed, I almost think we might catch the 6.45 train to-morrow morning to London. I *have* got most of our things packed. The sooner she is away from here the better. I thought Sandgate would be a good place to go to. We've never been there; it's quiet, I believe. Really, we might stay there until the move is accomplished and everything settled."

"But, Jessie," said Mrs Pottinger, "how can you get her ready in time?"

"Oh, I'll manage her somehow," said Jessie. "Don't you agree that it is the best plan?"

"I suppose it is," said her mother slowly.

They were all silent again. Then Mrs Pottinger said nervously:

"I don't believe she realises at all—I'm sure she expects to be taken home——"

Jessie nodded.

"She won't like it," she said.

"Then she's got to like it," said Mr Pottinger bitterly.

"I *must* see her before you start," began Mrs Pottinger, but her husband interrupted her.

"What right has *she* to talk about what she likes or doesn't like? Hasn't she done enough harm already?"

"She has been punished for her folly, Joseph," said Mrs Pottinger. "Let us trust she will take the lesson to heart."

"Folly!" echoed Mr Pottinger, pushing back his chair. "Folly, do you call it? Folly!"

He started up, and shaking one fist in the air, he strode across the room.

"Folly! God help us all!"

Jessie's eyes met her mother's in a long, silent, meaning gaze.

Mr Pottinger stumped back to them, and they both looked into his face with an intensity that hurt and exasperated him. With an angry snort he turned round and again paced to the other side of the room.

He came back and struck the table with his hand.

"Let her be thankful that I've not disowned her," he said. "But I will stand no nonsense. Understand that."

"Oh, it wouldn't have done to disown her," said Jessie judicially. "People would have said at once——"

"What the devil will it matter to me *what* people say about her or me when my name is Jones or Robinson?" cried Mr Pottinger. "No, she's my daughter, and to a certain point I'm responsible for her. God knows, matters could hardly be worse than they are, but most of her life is yet before her, and I'm not going to have it on my conscience that—that she—that—that—that——" He half choked, and, wheeling round, he strode across the room again.

Jessie stared into the fire with an air of profound discouragement.

"What *are* you going to do with her?" she asked in a low voice.

Mrs Pottinger stiffened with an air of righteous disapprobation.

"I cannot understand it! I cannot understand it at all," she said in her dry, dull voice. "She has been brought up with every advantage. I have given her every care. But I cannot recognise her as *my* child. She has always caused me grave anxiety. I thanked God when I saw her married to a good man, and considerably older than herself too. I thought she was safely established. I only asked to see her with a baby of her own. And *now*"—her lips trembled—"that a child of mine——"

She did not finish.

Jessie sighed.

"Poor John," she said.

Mr Pottinger sat down heavily in his arm-chair by the fire, and resting his elbows on his knees, he covered his face with his hands.

It was a few minutes to eleven. There was no sound to be heard in the room but the tick of the clock and the light shifting of the fire. When the hour began to strike, Jessie raised her head.

"We ought to go to bed," she said. "Especially if we are to be up so early to-morrow. I must set my alarm."

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE before half-past five the next morning Jessie came into Henrietta's room, and turned up the gas. She was wearing a red dressing-gown, tied in at the waist by a silk cord ; her dark hair was hanging down in a loose, meagre plait, exposing a certain flatness to the back of her head which made her features appear older and more marked than they really were.

The light of the gas did not disturb Henrietta, who was sleeping with her face turned towards the wall, and half buried in the pillow. Jessie went to the side of the bed, and touched her shoulder.

"Henrietta!" She shook her gently.

Mrs Harris woke with a shudder, uttering an inarticulate cry of terror.

"Oh don't! I—I—it's not——"

"It's only me," said Jessie compassionately. "It's all right."

Henrietta let her head sink back into the pillow with a gasp of relief.

"O Jessie!"

Her lip trembled for an instant as if she were going to cry, but she simply remained silently gazing up into Miss Pottinger's face with wide-open eyes, from which the disturbance only gradually died away. Jessie suddenly found that she herself was choking with uncontrollable tears. The mute revela-

tion of the look on Henrietta's face, almost childlike in its simplicity, brought home to her as nothing else had done the reality of the tragedy that had threatened them. A rush of memories of their childhood together shook her. She bent over her sister and kissed her impulsively, the tears streaming down her pale cheeks.

"Why, Jessie . . . why, Jessie . . ." stammered Henrietta, taken by surprise. Then, throwing her arms round Jessie's neck, she kissed her vehemently in return.

Miss Pottinger freed herself, and taking a handkerchief from her dressing-gown pocket, she sat down on the edge of the bed and wiped her eyes. For a moment neither spoke. Then Jessie uttered a shamefaced little laugh.

"Well, I didn't wake you up only to behave like this," she said.

"It would have been quite worth while," replied Henrietta fervently, laying her hand upon her sister's knee. She looked excited and almost buoyant.

Jessie blew her nose.

"Still, we haven't time for sentiment now," she said, rising briskly. "I came to tell you to get up."

"To get up!" cried Henrietta. "But, good gracious! what time is it?"

"Oh, it's not really so very early," said Jessie airily. "It's getting light."

"But. . . . Good gracious!" exclaimed Henrietta again. "Why on earth am I to get up now? Is anything the matter? I don't understand."

Jessie laughed indulgently.

"No, I don't suppose you do," she said. "We settled last night, after you had gone to bed, that the sooner we get away from this dreadful place the better, and so we thought we would catch the earliest train we could this morning. Everything is packed.

All we've got to do is to get dressed and have breakfast. I'll bring you some hot water; I've got a kettle on the spirit-lamp."

She turned to go.

"But, Jessie, wait!" cried Henrietta. "You mean to say we are going home now? But——"

Every nerve in her was immediately alert with opposition, but in the hurry of her surprise she could not define the objections she felt. She raised herself on her elbow and looked round for a clock.

"But what on earth *is* the time?" she asked petulantly.

"About half - past five," replied Jessie, as she opened the door and went out.

"Don't go! Jessie! Jessie!" cried Mrs Harris; but Miss Pottinger had already closed the door.

Henrietta was angry. She lay back on her pillow and began to think hastily. Half-past five! *Half-past five!* With a quick thrill of misgiving she divined that her relatives were hoping to escape notice. They were ashamed! Ashamed of what had happened! Ashamed of *her*! Again she felt the dreary sense of disillusionment that had depressed her the evening before. For a moment all purpose and interest seemed to have vanished out of life; but almost instantly sheer indignation and the belief that she had "seen through" her relations restored her self-confidence. They wanted to hustle her out of sight, did they? Did they imagine that she was going to submit to such a proceeding without question? Did they think she would not see what they really meant? Of course, they were ashamed of her! And what was more, they mistrusted her sense of decorum! She pressed her lips obstinately together. Nothing on earth should induce her to run away in the middle of the night. She was innocent in the eyes of the law. She would face the world with dignity.

She pictured herself arriving at the station at midday, pretty and pathetic in her black gown.

Some one would be sure to recognise her; they would point her out to each other with an interest and sympathy and admiration of which she, of course, would be unconscious. There would be a paragraph in the paper next day. Perhaps they would even cheer her, as the train steamed away.

Jessie came back into the room with a tin kettle in her hand, which she put down in the fender.

"Come, Henrietta," she said. "Do get up."

Henrietta did not move.

"You've not told me why we are going at this unearthly hour," she said.

"I should have thought it was hardly necessary to explain," said Jessie bitterly. "We naturally thought that you would prefer to escape observation——"

A new suspicion suddenly occurred to Henrietta, and she interrupted her sister imperiously.

"Are we going home?" she demanded.

"No," said Jessie, with some embarrassment. "We thought you ought to have a complete change of scene and air. We thought a week or two at the sea-side—Sandgate——"

Henrietta laughed shortly.

"I see," she said; "and mother and father—are *they* coming?"

"No," said Jessie reluctantly. "They—I—we thought——"

Henrietta fixed her eyes upon her sister.

"I'm not going to stir," she said, and Jessie regarded her in helpless discomfort.

"I won't be disposed of!" cried Henrietta furiously. "Do you think I don't understand what you are doing? But I'm not a fool! I'm not blind! You want to hide me away! You're ashamed of me! You couldn't be more unkind if—if——"

Jessie pulled herself together.

"My dear Henrietta," she said in a full, staid voice, "you are behaving in an absurdly exaggerated way."

"Well, I won't be disposed of!" cried Mrs Harris again.

Miss Pottinger continued to speak with dignity.

"You are overstrained, and no wonder; you have been through a great deal. But if you will consider a little, I think you will see that you are imagining a grievance where there is none."

Henrietta looked incredulous and obstinate.

"Why did you plan it all behind my back?" she asked resentfully.

"Surely it was natural that we should wish to spare you the details of arrangements as far as possible," replied Jessie. "Really, the extraordinary way you have taken this, just shows how much you must need a change and rest."

Jessie was struck by the note of sincerity in her own voice, and she felt uncomfortable to find herself conveying a false impression so convincingly. She tried to reassure herself with the thought that what she said was actually true, though it was not the whole truth. And, indeed, what else could she do? It was one of those occasions when sincerity would be too drastic in its results.

Mrs Harris's attention was arrested. It was quite true; she did want a change, and she liked the prospect of a week or two at the sea. She was worn out with emotion. But—were they *really* thinking of her benefit? That was the question. She eyed her sister doubtfully. It was possible, of course, and after Jessie's unexpected display of feeling that morning it seemed almost likely. She recollected the scene with gratification, and her anger evaporated at the thought of it.

And then it would be a relief to get away from her

father and mother. She dreaded the oppression of their gloomy silence, even for a day. And it occurred to her, too, with a small sense of triumph, that she might be able to manage Jessie if they were alone together. If *only* she could be sure they were not trying to dispose of her!

"Anyway it's too late now to catch the early train," she said undecidedly.

"Not if you hurry," exclaimed Jessie.

"Really?" Henrietta sat up quickly, and half pushed aside the bed-clothes. Then she paused.

"Think how delightful it will be to get right away from this dreadful place," urged Jessie, and Henrietta, suddenly making up her mind, sprang out of bed.

"Fly and dress," she cried; "I will be ready in next to no time!"

When they came down to the parlour they found Mrs Pottinger there, wearing a brown Shetland shawl over her black gown. The blinds were up and the curtains drawn back from the windows, and she looked pallid and dingy in the bleak morning light. The room looked dingy too. The ashes of last night's fire were grey and dead in the grate. A tea-pot and two tea-cups on a tray stood on the table, which had not been laid, and as Mrs Pottinger cut two or three slices of bread and butter the crumbs fell on to the coloured cloth.

The small, unkempt maid-of-all-work followed Jessie into the room.

"Please, m'm, the cab is here," she said.

"Oh, then let them take the boxes down," said Miss Pottinger, "we will come in a minute. We have only time for a mouthful, Henrietta."

Mrs Harris was thankful for the bustle. She was thankful that her father had not appeared, thankful that her mother had no time to speak of anything but the details of the moment. How glad she was

that she would not have to spend another day in this room—in the atmosphere of depression that seemed to surround each of her parents like a dark fog!

She caught sight of herself in the glass, as she had done the night before, and she surreptitiously took note of her appearance while she drank her tea. She looked wonderfully fair and young in her widow's weeds.

They left their cups half emptied, and kissed Mrs Pottinger, who followed them out on to the stairs. All three were embarrassed. The moment seemed to demand something more than commonplaces, and yet each of them instinctively avoided any word of intimacy. Too much was unexplained between them, and mutually they disregarded all that was real in their relations to each other.

"Be sure and let me hear from you," said Mrs Pottinger. "Send me your address soon."

"I will write to-night," said Jessie, looking back as she went along the passage to the front door.

Then at this moment of departure Mrs Pottinger suddenly felt the dissatisfaction of shirking a crisis. She descended a few more steps.

"And--and—Henrietta——"

Henrietta looked round with an air of smiling but defensive enquiry, and Mrs Pottinger drew back.

"No, no! Nothing," she said; "you must go, or you will miss your train."

CHAPTER IV

It was not until they were settled in an empty first-class carriage that Henrietta realised how really exhausted she was, and still partly under the effect of the sleeping-draught of the night before she sank into a state of somnolence that lasted more or less throughout the journey. Miss Pottinger, too, was intolerably weary, but she could not sleep. She was sitting opposite her sister, and with a feeling of relief she watched Henrietta's eyes close and her lips gently part as she rested her head in the cushioned angle of the seat. If only they could pass the day without an explanation! Again and again Jessie turned over in her mind the questions she feared, and arranged evasive and half-true replies. She considered anxiously how to avoid the small incidents that might precipitate plain speech between them; the thought of the false names on their luggage-labels weighed on her mind with a sense of guilt. Again and again she planned her course of action on arriving at Sandgate. Once that they were settled in rooms there, she felt she could cope with the immediate situation; she dared not think of the future.

They had a second breakfast at Liverpool Street, and caught a train which brought them to Sandgate about the middle of the afternoon. Henrietta remained drowsily passive and left everything to Jessie's management. Miss Pottinger enquired for

rooms at the chemist's shop, and whilst she interviewed the landlady of those recommended, Henrietta waited outside in the cab and heard nothing of what passed.

As soon as the matter was settled, Jessie helped her sister upstairs and put her to bed, waiting on her as if she were really ill. It was with a sense of achievement that she unpacked both her own and Henrietta's boxes.

The next morning Mrs Harris woke refreshed, and her first conscious impression was the sound of the subdued incessant splash of the sea. Their rooms were in a short terrace of some six houses that led nowhere; a breakwater and broken land overlooked by the backs of various buildings ended it on each side, and a small passage communicated with the High Street, with which it ran parallel. Nothing but a narrow road lay between the houses and the beach.

When Jessie came down into the sitting-room she found Henrietta already there, standing in the bow of the window, which was wide open. A pale mist covered sea and sky, but at its edge little cold clear grey waves were breaking upon the shingle, and from time to time a grey sea-gull flew out of the fog and vanished into it again.

As Jessie came into the room, Henrietta pointed.

"Do you see?" she said; "the mist is breaking."

A faint blue patch of sky showed immediately overhead, and even as she spoke the mist was dissolving from before the sun, and parted into shifting, thin-edged clouds, between which an infinite distance appeared of clear blue atmosphere and sparkling sea.

Miss Pottinger rang the bell for breakfast.

"My dear Henrietta," she said, "it's very cold."

Mrs Harris laughed gaily.

"It is, isn't it," she replied, shutting the window.
"But it is so delicious to be by the sea again."

She offered her cheek to her sister to kiss.

"How are you?" asked Jessie. "Did you sleep?
I did not expect to see you up so early. Are you
quite rested?"

"Oh, completely," said Henrietta, "and very
hungry."

During breakfast Jessie was preoccupied, and hardly responded to Mrs Harris's idle, contented comments upon the weather, the gulls, and the passing boats. That morning she must tell Henrietta of their plans, and the uncertainty as to what effect the information might have on her sister disturbed her seriously. She shrank instinctively from any sort of crisis, and she suspected that on this account Henrietta had an advantage over her. Still, it had to be done. It was no longer possible to put it off.

Whilst the breakfast things were being cleared away she sat by the fire pretending to read part of the newspaper, the rest of which lay on the floor where Henrietta had dropped it, after skimming the pages in vain for some reference to herself. As soon as they were alone together Jessie put down the paper on her lap, and looked round. Henrietta was again standing by the window swinging the tassel of the blind to and fro.

"When shall we go out?" said Mrs Harris. "The mist has quite cleared, and it's lovely. We might go on to the beach this morning, and to Folkestone this afternoon."

Miss Pottinger did not reply, and Henrietta said again:

"What time shall we go out?"

"Not just yet," said Jessie, with obvious trepidation.
"I want to talk to you first."

Henrietta stopped swinging the tassel, and held it fast in her hand

"Well?" she said.

"Father and mother have asked me to tell you their plans," said Jessie, with the grave dignity of voice and mien which she was apt to assume in moments of nervousness. "After what has happened, they feel it impossible to take up life again in the same surroundings, and while we are here they are going to look for a house in some other part of England, and move in at once. And also——" She hesitated, but Henrietta said nothing, nor did she move from where she was standing; she was regarding her sister quite steadily. "And also," resumed Jessie, "father feels that he must start life completely afresh, and he—you know he has taken the publicity of this very much to heart, and he feels that he can have no peace of mind unless we change our names. Indeed, there can be no question about the necessity of such a step; it is the only thing to do. Of course you have probably thought of it all; only one must talk over a decision of this sort."

Henrietta did not reply at once.

"I don't see why it's 'of course,'" she said presently in a rather dry voice and staring straight in front of her.

Jessie had expected an indignant outcry, and there was something almost pitiful in the controlled way Henrietta spoke which made her heart ache.

She pushed back her chair and sat up.

"My dear," she said hurriedly, "I'm afraid you don't realise——"

"Don't realise what?"

"I mean it *is* the only thing to do," said Jessie, rising and going a few steps towards her. "If we want to have friends—I mean unless *we* leave our own surroundings, *they* will turn us out, and—and—it is better to start afresh where no one knows us."

"But," cried Henrietta, with red cheeks and flashing eyes, "I've been acquitted!"

Jessie drew back.

"You seem to forget *that!*" cried Mrs Harris, as Miss Pottinger did not reply at once.

"Have you *no* sense of shame?" said Jessie in a low voice.

For a moment Henrietta felt abashed, but she persisted almost with desperation in a show of self-possession.

"I suppose, then," she remarked incisively, "you have chosen to give assumed names here."

Jessie bowed her head in assent.

"Yes, I have."

"If you are ashamed of me," said Henrietta, with bitterness, "I had better go and live by myself. Indeed, I suppose that is what you are hinting at."

"Most certainly not!" cried Jessie vehemently. "We had none of us contemplated such a thing!"

"And so that's why you were so anxious I should have change of air," continued Mrs Harris. "And I actually believed you—I——"

"Good Heavens!" interrupted Miss Pottinger, "how can you be so unjust? Can't you see that we are doing all we can to help you? Can't you understand that though we cannot help recognising your indiscretions we have a very real affection for you? But other people won't make allowances for you. They will call your follies by a harder name. They won't forget that you have been accused of a—*a crime*. There is a slur on your reputation, and it—*it extends to us!*"

"And who is responsible for my follies?" cried Henrietta passionately. "What sort of a life do you think I led with John? Why was I urged to marry him?"

"He was a good man," said Jessie. "A good, kind man. If you could not love him as you ought, you could have respected him as a friend."

"Respected him!" Henrietta uttered a little shriek of laughter. "Respected him! You don't know what you are talking about. What do you suppose marriage with a man you don't love is like? It's horrible! It's suffocating! In marriage you must either love or hate. I—*hated* him."

She clenched her fists in genuine emotion.

"*Henrietta!*"

"A middle-aged money-grubber! And he had horrid ways! And mind you, *I could not get away from him*. He made my life hateful. I dreaded every evening when he was coming home. I dreaded being in the same room with him. I couldn't forget he was there, even when he wasn't speaking. And you—*you!* You none of you helped me! You none of you understood! You none of you saw that I was wretched, or would have cared if you had seen it! Oh, I was *in* life! There was no need to bother about *any* more! You seemed to think that the mere fact of being married was enough for any woman! What did it matter if her husband were vulgar, a tyrant and interested in nothing but making money! Good God! I'm not—not soulless! I'm not brainless! Why should I submit to a life that degraded me? I swear I am a better woman now that he is dead than I should have been if I had *liked* such a life! Yes, I am better than that, though I am *glad* that he is dead! Though——"

She stopped short to take breath. There was a moment's dead silence. Then Henrietta said quite quietly:

"I did do it, you know."

It seemed to Jessie that something gave way in

her brain; a mist swam before her eyes, and there was a rushing sound in her ears.

She had suspected it, but she had been ashamed of the suspicion, accusing herself of a base want of charity, and she had not realised, she had not allowed herself to realise, what she would feel at *knowing* beyond all doubt that her sister was guilty. The words stunned her like a physical blow, and somehow all her energies seemed to be absorbed in an effort to remain standing.

Henrietta glanced at her furtively. She was half frightened at the sound of her words, and yet relieved that they sounded so ordinary. The sight of her sister's white, horror-struck face increased her alarm, and shook her confidence in the simplicity of the statement.

"Why don't you speak?" she cried nervously. "Jessie, don't look like that."

She went quickly towards her.

"Can't you understand! I was half mad with misery! Daily, hourly miseries! He was killing me! He was killing my soul, and self-defence is not murder! It is not! I swear it is not! I was justified, and that was why I could plead not guilty. Before heaven and earth, I declare, I was justified."

The mist had cleared from Jessie's sight, and she gazed at her sister with appalled eyes. She was standing rigidly erect.

"Jessie, for God's sake, try and understand me! Oh, you must! You *must*! It was under intolerable temptation that I even thought of doing it, and then somehow it didn't seem real. I could hardly believe that it was what I was doing that did it. But somehow I couldn't stop—but—oh what—what was I saying?" She swallowed, and went on. "I defy any woman to have resisted in my place! Any woman who isn't half soulless, Jessie. It was the good side of

me that made me want to escape, and once it was done, what was I to do? I couldn't own that I was guilty, could I?"

Still Jessie made no sign.

"But think! Think what it would have meant!" cried Henrietta in desperation. "It was impossible. And now I am safe—safe for always! You know that? And I am free from *him*, free to live, to be the kind of woman I have always dreamt of being! Jessie, Jessie, for Heaven's sake, speak!"

She panted for breath; she licked her dry lips quickly, and again swallowed.

"Can't you see that I can't repent!" she began again, but her voice died away. She was harassed by increasing misgivings; Jessie's silence accused her beyond appeal. She lost confidence. Consciousness of guilt and responsibility overcame her. Uneasy questions about the necessity of repentance, and retribution, questions that seemed beyond solution, suddenly occurred to her. She *felt guilty*.

"Jessie," she said, struggling to keep from crying, "don't—don't—do be kind to me! After all, it's—it's done now."

She held out her hands, the tears running down her cheeks and her mouth quivering.

But Jessie drew back sharply.

"Yes, it *is* done," she said in a low voice, "and it can't be undone."

And she turned quickly, and went out of the room.

CHAPTER V

A FEW days later Frank Goulburn arrived in Folkestone from Boulogne and took a room in one of the hotels overlooking the Leas. He was a tall, thin man of about forty, slightly stooping, clean-shaven except for a brown, bushy moustache that covered his upper lip. Every feature was of discreet size, and so ordinary that it was difficult for a casual acquaintance to recall his face when away from him. The only salient characteristic was his carefully civilised expression, which seemed to carry out in detail the extreme gentlemanliness of his general appearance.

He gave the name of Francis Smith at the hotel with masterly unconcern, and having changed his appropriate travelling clothes for a suit of brown tweed, appropriate to the sea-side, he went out to saunter on the Leas.

It was a still, cloudy, sultry evening, threatening rain. The sea far below him at the foot of the cliffs was smooth and sullen. The only colour in nature was the vivid green grass, and a faint rosy streak between the clouds to the west. Goulburn, however, accepted effects of nature as a matter of course. He had come to stay by the sea, and here was the sea, just like any other sea. He was glad it did not rain, but would have preferred the sun to shine. The chief points that, to his mind, were worthy of comment were the size and comfort of the hotels, and so pleasant a "promenade" as the Leas.

He took note casually, almost subconsciously, of the people, particularly the women, who like himself were strolling over the grass, and he congratulated himself upon his resolution to spend some days in Folkestone. Yes; decidedly it was a good move. The place itself was attractive, and the visitors looked the sort of people one would like to know! Also it gave him time to review the situation. Of course, he really had been doing little else for some time past, but the mere fact of being in England again seemed to call for a pause.

Dear old England! It was almost worth while to have been an exile from one's native land just for the pleasure of getting back again, of feeling English soil under one's foot, and hearing English voices round one! However badly the old country had served him, he could bear her no grudge. Nothing could alter the British blood in his veins. He was an Englishman through and through, and proud of it. And no one in all the world could appreciate as an Englishman could, the true meaning of the word "home."

Naturally, the first consideration was money. Two hundred pounds a year was not enough. If he had not been so crushed at the time by his imprisonment, he would never have been fool enough to accept it. The recollection of his broken spirit filled him with compassion. It had really been confoundedly low of Dick to take advantage of his state of mind and put him off with so small a sum. However, if Dick had been willing to give him two hundred a year *then*, to keep out of the way, it was quite likely that he could be induced to pay more for the same purpose under pressure.

"Though, of course, it's to *my* advantage to keep out of the way," thought Francis Goulburn anxiously. "However, that didn't seem to occur to him in those

days, and the chances are it wont occur to him now. He was always pretty dense, was old Dick."

By Jove! That was a pretty girl. He had forgotten how pretty English girls were! The younger of the two ladies who had crossed in the same boat with him had been something of the same type. He thought with satisfaction how efficiently he had been able to help them. He had almost hoped that the acquaintanceship would not have ended there. Friends for an hour, and then to part, and possibly never to meet again! It was one of those melancholy little incidents with which life is filled. And they might so easily have asked him to call; but people like that were always timid. How often timidity must be responsible for empty lives in which nothing particular happens.

"Missed opportunities! Eh well!" Goulburn sighed heavily.

His thoughts returned to the question of his income, and he smiled. It really was extraordinarily funny to think of Dick forking out large sums in order to make it worth his while to do the very thing he wanted to do! Of course, Francis Goulburn and everything to do with Francis Goulburn must vanish. His only hope of a pleasant life lay in a completely new start; and it was not as if this would lose him any of his old friends. Not one of them had stuck to him in his troubles! Not one! He could be pretty certain, on the other hand, of escaping recognition. It was some years since he had been seen about, and in those days he had worn beard and whiskers. Besides, he could back himself to disconcert any one who might attempt to claim his acquaintance.

So far so good. But what next?

He stood still, and leaning over the railings, gazed out over the grey sea. He was filled with a vague discontent. There was no doubt he had been

cursedly unlucky. Hundreds were doing the same thing that he had done every day, but because they played the game successfully, their reputations remained unblemished. They were wealthy and respected. And any one of these men would give him the cold shoulder now, just because they had to live up to the fiction of right and wrong.

Well, after all, it was possibly a necessary fiction.

He strolled on towards Sandgate.

Of course there must be law for the convenience of the social order, but if one really thought things out, one was bound to come to the conclusion that nothing was *intrinsically* right or wrong. Such terms were purely a convention. Stealing, for example! It was only for the convenience of society that it had come to be considered a crime. Reason could not prove the right of personal property. Of course, one ought to conform more or less to the law for the good of the state, but it was permissible to carry one's individual liberty to all lengths as long as one was prepared for the consequences.

He felt himself to be magnanimous in his attitude towards the system under which he had suffered, but then he prided himself on a calm fairness of mind. He was above personal prejudice.

As he turned presently to go back, he noticed two ladies approaching from the opposite direction. One was a tall, fair young widow, and her companion was a small dark woman, who gave him a general impression of being insignificant, well-bred and worried. The widow, on the contrary, was conspicuous, and though she did not actually in any way court attention, yet there was a subtle lack of aloofness in her air, and Goulburn felt no scruple in eyeing her as they passed.

A good-looking woman, by George! She was not likely to remain a widow long. Probably staying

in Sandgate, as they were going in that direction so near dinner-time. He wondered who she was. Oddly enough, her face struck him as familiar, but she obviously did not recollect him, whoever she might be. Possibly she had been the wife of some one he had known in the old days. Well, her husband, whoever he was, was out of the way now, at any rate, and the field was clear for his successor.

Ah, that brought him to the very heart of the situation. He wanted a wife! He wanted a home! The thought made him sentimental. He had been harassed by the storms of the world, buffeted by the merciless winds of ill-luck, shipwrecked and an outcast. Now he craved for a haven. All he asked of life was a home in the country, a wife, and a sufficient income.

Old Dick, too, would be much more likely to stump up if he could put it to him that he was going to be married and settle down.

And there was no reason why he should not settle down now. It would be no craven knocking under because he had had the worst of it. Not at all. He still asserted his opinion that the terms of right and wrong were a convention, invented for social convenience, but that being admitted, he was open-minded enough to recognise that Law, even with all its imperfections, tended to the general welfare. He was a citizen, and public-spirited. Therefore, for the sake of his fellow-citizens, he was ready to submit to a compromise.

That evening at the *table d'hôte* he let his eye wander along the line of faces on each side of the table, and he experienced a vague feeling of disappointment. His immediate neighbour on his right was a lean, elderly lady; on his left sat a little boy of about twelve, whose father and mother were

opposite. Further along there was a noisy party of half-grown boys and girls, with a stout, florid mamma, whom he stigmatised at once as "middle-class." The lean lady was better than that, at any rate, and he was careful to pass her the salt before she asked for it. She thanked him shyly, and murmured a remark to her other neighbour, an extremely old lady with a crumpled face, and the remote expression of one whose senses are all dimmed. Then the lean lady glanced again at Goulburn.

"It *has* been a dull day, hasn't it?" she remarked to him.

"Yes," he said. "And I'm afraid it looks like rain to-night."

"A poor look-out for the farmers," grunted the father of the little boy, looking up from his soup. "It seems that the sun can't shine for more than half a day at a time this year. I never saw such a spring!"

"Has it been very wet?" enquired Goulburn. "I only arrived this afternoon from the Continent, you know," he added.

"Really?" he lady opposite to him. "You must have had a good crossing; quite calm and no glare?"

He assented with a smile. He decided that these people were quite sufficiently nice; the man was a well-brushed, red-faced country squire, and his wife a lady of gentle aspect, slightly faded, but with pretty brown eyes and a pleasant smile. He was stimulated to make himself agreeable.

"The fact is," he said, "I am in that frame of mind that I should not have cavilled at the stormiest of crossings provided I got to England in the end. There's nothing like travelling abroad to make one appreciate one's native land."

"By George, I'm with you there!" exclaimed the

Squire. "I only once went abroad, and then such a confounded——"

"My dear William," interposed his wife, laughing.

"Eh, what? Well they *were* a confounded lot of patent leather swindlers! As polite as you like, but making you pay through the nose for it all the time."

They all laughed, and the little boy shook with suppressed giggles, hanging his crimson face over his plate.

"Have you travelled much?" enquired the lean lady as she helped herself to vegetables.

"Oh, I've been a rolling stone," said Goulburn lightly. "I've always felt the attraction of what lies a little further on, you know."

The Squire looked at him.

"Ah, you've probably done the thing thoroughly," he said, nodding his head. "That's quite another pair of shoes."

Goulburn made no disclaimer. He liked the idea that he had travelled extensively. It gave him a position, and was an adequate reply to a good many awkward questions.

"What a contrast Folkestone must seem to you," said the lean lady effusively. "Are you staying here at all? No? Just passing through, I suppose?"

Goulburn realised that any sojourn in Folkestone would require a little casual explanation. Of course they would wonder why he did not go at once to his friends or relations, and even if he were really alone in the world, Folkestone was hardly the place that a man would choose to stay in without some inducement.

"I may be here a day or two," he replied. "I hardly know. I've given this address for some letters. I shall probably wait for them to turn up. And it's not half a bad place. Quite nice out there on the Leas."

"Oh, you might do worse," said the Squire. "We come for the children, you know. We've two others besides that youngster there, but they're in bed. We come here every spring for a bit. Sea air's supposed to be the thing for 'em. Though how any one is to afford trips of this sort nowadays I don't see. Talk of agricultural depression——"

"Now, William," interposed his wife, but he paid no attention to her.

"What's the use of talking," he grumbled. "It's a *fact*. And a fact that's got to be dealt with. Why, look here. I don't know if you remember eight years ago——" He looked up questioningly at Goulburn.

"Eight years ago!" repeated Goulburn. The words thrilled him with a sudden discomfort. In that year he had stood his trial for fraudulent dealing. "No," he said coolly. "I shouldn't know much what was going on in the country then. I—I was shooting big game."

The parallel pleased him, and he smiled thoughtfully. They all looked at him with increased interest.

"Yes," he went on; "and jolly well near done for on more than one occasion."

"Indeed!"

"By Jove, yes," said Goulburn, leaning back in his chair and fingering the stem of his wine-glass. A story that a chance acquaintance had told him had occurred to him, and he repeated it as if it had been his own experience.

"No, I know nothing of what was going on at that time," he said, "except what I've heard since. I was not only out of reach of news of any sort, but for six months I never even spoke to any one but natives. There was another Englishman with me, but . . . you see three of us had started, but one fell ill and

died, and not long after I and the other one had a pretty stiff difference of opinion. Well, we couldn't very easily separate then, so we went on together and followed out our plan, but from that moment we never exchanged one word."

"You don't say so?" exclaimed the Squire, putting down his spoon and fork and staring at him.

"I should have thought a quarrel would seem insignificant out there," said his wife.

"How could you bear it?" cried the lean lady.

"Bless me, I should have fought it out or made it up," said the Squire. "I couldn't have stood your method." And picking up his spoon and fork he finished his pudding in two mouthfuls.

"The fact was, we were too civilised and not civilised enough," said Goulburn, unconsciously repeating the remarks with which the story had been told him. "But what began from anger went on from habit. Out there, where nature is on that scale, silence takes hold of one, you know."

CHAPTER VI

THE next morning Goulburn and Henrietta spoke together for the first time.

The morning was wet, but in the afternoon the rain stopped and Goulburn walked into Sandgate, moved by a feeling of dissatisfaction with things in general, and a half-conscious and irrational hope that he might see the good-looking widow again. His mood was discontented. The talk of the evening before had amused him at the time; such a position was humorous enough in its way, but it was not worth while. Playing a part bored him; he had had enough of it. What he wanted was to be accepted without question for what he felt himself to be—a respectable, law-abiding citizen of domestic tastes.

Mrs Harris also went out by herself that afternoon. Jessie had caught cold, and Henrietta, thankful to escape her sister's vigilance, chose her opportunity to slip out of the house unperceived. She was very unhappy. An impassable barrier had arisen between her and Jessie, who yet kept watch over her as if she were a prisoner. Henrietta believed herself to be beyond appeal as far as Miss Pottinger was concerned; she was made to feel it every hour of the day. Jessie was perfectly civil, but repellent, cold, and disapproving. At moments Henrietta would perceive her sister's eyes fixed on her with a look of

horror. Mrs Harris became listless and despondent. She was filled with pity for her own desolation, especially as she felt that it was so unnecessary. If only Miss Pottinger had been capable of the least sympathy—but of course she might have known how Jessie would behave. She had been a fool to tell her! Bitterly she repented her moment of rashness, and she vowed that never, never would she tell any other living soul. There were times even when Jessie's attitude towards her led her to doubt the validity of her own excuses, and the vague alarm at what she had done which had disturbed her from time to time, now began to haunt her. But worst of all, she found that she could not maintain her belief in her own charm and worth without the support of at least one other person's friendliness.

She longed disconsolately for something to happen, no matter what. Anything to distract her. She did not know what she wanted. She only knew that she was unkindly treated, and forlorn, and that life was unutterably dismal.

She turned into the High Street a few yards in front of Goulburn, but without noticing him. He followed her at a discreet distance to the end of the little town, where the esplanade began.

Very few people were out. Sky and sea were heavy, swollen and sombre, and the wet asphalt was a hard black-blue. Sea-gulls swooped down to touch the grey water and rise again gleaming white against the grey clouds, and a line of pale foam lay along the restless edge of the sea. Henrietta's slim, black figure contrasted strongly with the surrounding pallor of sky and sea, and her fair face looked fairer in the dreary daylight.

She walked quickly to the end of the esplanade. There she paused and stood gazing out over the sea with melancholy, inattentive eyes.

Without turning her head she caught sight of Goulburn, who was advancing slowly towards her. He was still at a little distance, and she watched him approach because there was nothing else that she particularly wished to watch. All at once she remembered having seen him the evening before; her interest was awakened, and she wondered who he might be. As he came nearer she perceived that he too was looking at her. She turned away her eyes again towards the sea, but she was conscious of his observation, and her heart fluttered as she heard him pass behind her. She made a sudden involuntary movement, and dropped her umbrella.

Goulburn, who was actually beside her, stooped instantly to pick it up.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you so much!" she exclaimed.

He smiled, raised his hat as he returned the umbrella to her, and was about to pass on. Then he hesitated.

"Pardon me, but surely—you will excuse me if I am mistaken, but am I not speaking to Mrs Williams?" he asked with gentlemanly diffidence.

She shook her head, regarding him with a smiling, investigating look.

"My name is Ha—Henderson," she said, and flushed crimson.

"A thousand pardons," he said. "There is so strong a resemblance, but having lost sight of my friends for some years—of course, *now* I see how stupid a mistake I have made. I had forgotten that Mrs Williams would no longer look as she did when I last saw her, without the gift of perennial youth. Please forgive me."

He passed on quickly, and Henrietta felt obliged to walk away in the opposite direction.

The encounter had excited her. She had read

admiration and interest in his look. Who was he? Was he staying there for any length of time? She wondered what Mrs Williams was like, and half laughed with gratification at the implied compliment of his last remark. Should she see him again? She pondered uneasily over the instinctive decision that had led her to give him her assumed name; she was a little surprised that she had done so, and a little disconcerted. But, of course, it was due to the petty persecution she had been enduring lately; Jessie had certainly succeeded in unnerving her.

Very likely it *was* as well she had not told him her real name. Still, she was inclined to regret it, for Mrs Henderson was nobody, while he would have known at once a great deal about Mrs Harris, and surely he could not look at her and judge her harshly.

Would he speak if they met again? She assured herself that he could not do such a thing, but at the bottom of her heart she both hoped and believed that he would.

It struck her presently as pathetic that so slight an incident should engross her like this. The interest roused in her proved how barren her life had been lately.

She found Jessie crouching over the fire with swollen eyes and red nose.

"How are you now?" enquired Henrietta. "You *do* look bad."

"Oh, I suppose, like all colds, it will run its course," said Jessie in a thick voice. "*You* will catch cold too if you go out in such weather," she added with suppressed irritation.

"It's not raining," said Henrietta, "nor is it cold. I'm sure I should be much more likely to catch your cold if I stayed shut up in this room all day."

"Let's have tea," said Jessie wearily. "Please ring."

The next morning Jessie stayed in bed. Henrietta was more relieved than she knew, or would have liked to acknowledge. Such a truth would have shocked her ideas of what was correct, and to prove to herself that she was certainly not heartless she became actively sympathetic. Relieved? Well, of course, she was relieved in a way. It was always a relief when a person "gave in," and ceased to struggle against an ailment.

"And, really, I believe the best thing I can do is to leave you to be quiet," she said, with an air of acknowledging a regrettable truth.

At about half-past ten she went out and walked to the sea-front. She strolled to the end of it and back again, and then turned once more.

It was a day of swift movement and sudden passing changes of light. A brisk breeze was blowing; big, white-edged clouds were travelling over the sky, sweeping shadows over the deep sparkling blue of the sea. The waves were drawing back from the shore with a long, sucking rush, and curling over to fall with deliberation again on to the shingle.

Henrietta felt that her sense of disillusionment was returning. She went on to the beach and sat down to watch some children bathing. Their laughter as they splashed about in the shallow water increased her melancholy. Life seemed to hold nothing for her that she cared to have. She knew what would happen. Day after day would slip by in unbroken monotony until the end of their stay in Sandgate. Then they would go to the house Mr Pottinger had taken in Sussex, and again she would be absorbed into an empty, soulless existence. And she would always be in disgrace, always an outcast! Her own people would always look askance at her, and shut her away from happiness—she who had had so little! Her eyes filled with tears.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear," she thought tragically.

A step ground on the shingle so near her that she looked up, startled. Goulburn was standing almost beside her, also watching the children, and apparently unconscious of her presence.

Then he chanced to look round, and catching her eye he took off his hat with a smile of pleasure.

"Isn't it a nice day?" said Henrietta shyly.

He leant forward to speak to her, resting both hands on the knob of his stick.

"I was just thinking how nice it would be to be as young as *that*," he said, nodding towards the children.

"We were never brought to the sea as children," said Henrietta. "I feel that it is something missed."

"It is indeed," he replied. "I shall never forget my first holidays by the sea. If ever I had youngsters of my own, I should make a point of giving them a good time at a place of this sort."

"Yes," said Henrietta. "I don't think parents should deprive their children of such experiences. Indeed any experience is better than none."

"Do you really think so?" he enquired. She found his manner of courteous attention charming.

"I do really," she said, and hesitated. Ought she to be talking like this to a complete stranger? It was unconventional, certainly, but he was so obviously a gentleman. And then at the sea-side one's code of behaviour was different. Besides, she was desperate. "It's always better to feel alive," she added.

"By all means. But I'm not sure that the absence of experience is not more comfortable," he said.

She suddenly glanced at him with flashing eyes.

"*It's dull*," she said, with intense meaning.

He half laughed, and for a moment neither spoke.

"Sandgate is a jolly little place," he remarked presently.

"Do you know it well?" asked Mrs Harris.

"I? No. I only arrived in Folkestone two days ago from abroad," he replied. "Have *you* been here long?"

"Nearly ten days," she said, and as she spoke she realised the dreariness of those ten days. "I suppose it is nice," she added, sighing, "but I've got horribly tired of it."

He regarded her with grave sympathy.

"I suppose, then, you will not be staying much longer?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "Who can say? The decision doesn't rest with me. Besides, I don't much care. It's no worse than any other place."

"Of course, I understand that there are times when all places must seem uninteresting," said Goulburn with solemnity.

"No! Yes! At least — you mustn't think——" began Henrietta, and then paused abruptly with red cheeks. She did not want him to think that she was heart-broken for her late husband, but unluckily it was impossible to say so.

Again there was a short silence.

Then Goulburn said:

"I think I passed you on the Leas, did I not, the day before yesterday?"

She pretended to consider.

"The day before yesterday? Tuesday?"

"You had another lady with you — small and dark."

"Oh yes, my sister," said Mrs Harris. "Yes, I *was* there."

"Your sister is quite unlike you," he said. Henrietta smiled.

"Yes," she said, "no one would think we were

related." She paused and then added: "She has caught cold, and is obliged to stay indoors."

"Indeed," said Goulburn. "How very unfortunate."

"It is, isn't it?" said Henrietta.

"And it must make it dull for you too," he added.

"Well, yes," she said. "It is—rather dull."

A sudden choking of self-pity rose in her at the word. She was afraid she was going to cry, and she got up quickly.

"I—I think it is getting late," she said. "I must be going home."

CHAPTER VII

DURING the next few days, while Jessie's cold kept her indoors, Goulburn and Mrs Harris met frequently. Henrietta was a little cast down by the discovery that his name was Smith. It was a distinct drawback. The name of Harris had always been distasteful to her, but Smith was much worse. Nothing, however, could really check her reviving animation. She felt herself once more called upon to be the heroine of a romance. Once more she began to believe in herself, and in the possibilities that life still held, and not even Jessie's bitter reserve could disturb her faith in the enchanting new aspect of the future.

At the end of two or three days neither Goulburn nor Henrietta felt any doubt that matrimony was the natural conclusion of this intercourse, but as they became more intimate both began to wish for some open confirmation to be given to their acquaintanceship. Each of them was secretly uneasy at the unconventionality of the situation, and each of them was anxious that the correctness of their relations should be established beyond all question. Once this was achieved the rest would follow as a matter of course, and both felt that Jessie was the obvious means of removing any taint of the unusual from their position. As soon as Goulburn had been introduced to her, any previous irregularity could be ignored.

Goulburn turned it over in his mind, and decided to hint his wishes to Henrietta on the first propitious occasion. He suspected that Jessie would be difficult, but this only gave him greater confidence in her propriety. Henrietta was already scheming for the same end. The fact that Jessie was fast recovering necessitated some decision, and Mrs Harris determined to brave her sister, and ask Mr Smith to call at their lodgings. The suspicion of what Jessie would think and say was perturbing, but that, after all, was a minor consideration, if only she could be induced to receive him at all. The best plan would be to invite him first, and then tell Jessie that she had done so, assuming that the whole thing was a perfectly ordinary proceeding. Henrietta knew that such an attitude would not benefit her much, but it would at least give her a standpoint of innocence, and she planned her explanations with this in view.

As a preliminary to the new act of the drama she replaced her widow's bonnet with a small black hat, and picked the crape trimming off her dresses. She spent the whole of one evening in effecting these changes, but Jessie made no comment, and she herself did not refer to what she was doing.

The following afternoon she met Goulburn on the Leas. She was a little embarrassed and self-conscious, and a little afraid lest the significance of her mitigated mourning should seem too patent. Goulburn, however, noted the difference in her dress triumphantly. Now it only remained for him to be introduced to her sister, and then he would be off to interview Dick.

"I am so glad to have met you," he said fervently, for they were always careful to meet by chance. "And may I say how very well you are looking?" he added, with meaning.

Henrietta flushed, and half laughed.

"I very nearly stayed at home," she said. "It's such an unpleasant day, but——"

"But, fortunately for me, you decided to face the elements," he said.

"If it had not been so cold," said Henrietta, "Jessie was going to come out to-day."

"Indeed? Then your sister is better?"

"Oh, she is really quite well," she replied, "only she ought to be careful the first time she goes out, you know."

There was a moment's pause. The hot colour again came into Mrs Harris's cheeks.

"I was wondering if I might ask you——" she said nervously. "I—I hope that you will come and see us, and let me introduce you to my sister."

"Thank you very much indeed, Mrs Henderson," he said with grave politeness. "I shall be delighted. I had indeed been bold enough to hope that—that I might make her acquaintance when she had recovered."

Henrietta did not respond, except by a rather forced smile. She was too anxious. The first step was taken now, and the rest had got to be managed somehow. She wished it was over; she wished Jessie was not so impracticable; she wished—she wished——

Suddenly she caught sight of a tall elderly lady in dark blue, who was advancing towards them.

"Why!" she exclaimed, stopping still.

He looked at her enquiringly.

"Do you see that lady—that tall one in blue?" she said eagerly. "That's our doctor's wife, Mrs Mathews. How funny she should have come here of all places. I had no idea that she was coming. Oh, I must stop and speak to her, and hear all the news."

Even as she spoke she recollected that she was under a cloud, and she repented her want of caution. For one second she hesitated. But it was too late

now ; she could not draw back without an explanation of some sort to Goulburn, and, after all, whatever Jessie might say, she had been acquitted.

In her flurry of mind she forgot all about her assumed name, and quickening her steps, she went bravely forward, but with a beating heart, towards the lady in blue. As they met, Goulburn fell a little behind. Henrietta held out her hand with a smile.

"How delightful to meet you here——" she began, but her voice died away to nothing. Mrs Mathews had instantly stiffened into rigidity, and looking into Henrietta's face with a merciless stare, she deliberately walked past her.

For one moment Henrietta felt as if the earth were dissolving beneath her feet, while the people, the green grass and grey sky had got mixed up in an unsubstantial blurr.

Then she swung round in terror to see if Goulburn were still there.

"Oh !" she gasped. The turmoil in her brain was incoherent ; her heart and nerves seemed to contract as if touched by some scorching acid. She lost all presence of mind.

Goulburn took her hand, and placed it firmly upon his arm.

"Lean on me," he said. "Don't try to speak. Don't give way here."

His touch calmed her a little, and she allowed him to lead her towards the edge of the grass.

Goulburn's first idea was to prevent her making a scene in public, to convey her somewhere where they would escape observation. He thought of a certain pastry-cook's shop in the High Street where tea could be had in an upstairs' room. It was quite early in the afternoon ; no one was likely to be there at this time, and he started to walk in that direction.

Neither of them spoke. Henrietta was in an agony of mind. The shock of discovery that Jessie had been right about the attitude of her friends, and the dread that her resuscitated romance was about to be shattered for ever, reduced her to a state of utter hopelessness, and it was only the feel of his arm under her hand that kept her from tears.

Goulburn, too, was considerably disturbed. What the devil did it all mean? Could it be possible that there was anything against her to justify such a slight?

He was sufficiently in love with her, to find such an idea both galling and difficult of belief, but the importance to him of an irreproachable wife was even greater than that of his feelings towards her. He thought ruefully that it was perhaps just as well he had not committed himself.

Still, the unhesitating pleasure with which Henrietta had accosted Mrs Mathews showed that at least the rebuff was unexpected. If she had not felt innocent she surely would not have exposed herself so unnecessarily. Goulburn need never have known that they were acquainted. Probably some personal grudge was at the bottom of it, but even so, he wished it had not happened. It looked ugly.

"Damn the woman!" he thought.

Another uneasy suspicion was harassing him. Supposing this Mrs Mathews had recognised *him*, and that *that* was the cause of her behaviour? He assured himself that such an idea was absurd, impossible! He was positive that he had never set eyes on her before. And surely it would be scarcely a reason for cutting his companion. Nevertheless, he could not get rid of the discomfort that the possibility roused in him.

Goulburn took Henrietta into the pastry-cook's, and led her upstairs. No one was there, and placing her at a table near the window he ordered

tea for two. Henrietta still controlled herself; her eyes were fixed on her hands, which lay in her lap. Neither spoke until the tea was placed before them and they were left alone.

Goulburn, who was sitting opposite to her, poured out a cup of tea, and passed it across the little round table.

"Now," he said, "you will feel better. Do you like milk and sugar?"

Henrietta began to cry. She fumbled for her handkerchief, and covered her face with it.

"Oh," she sobbed, "what must you think?"

"Think?" he said boldly. "I think that she is a very ill-bred woman."

"How could I know she'd take it like that!" sobbed Henrietta unwarily.

Goulburn wrinkled his forehead in apprehension.

Her words were a shock to herself, and she pulled herself together. *He must never know.* She could no longer feel any confidence that his sympathy would be with her. She was thankful now that she had given him her assumed name.

"I mean," she said, "I—you see, she liked my husband." Her lips trembled. "I suppose she thinks *this*"—she indicated her hat—"w—w—want of respect—and—and seeing me with you——" Her tears began to flow again, but she felt better. After all, that *might* have been the reason.

Goulburn felt a quick relief.

"Then you don't know of anything more definite," he began, but corrected himself hurriedly. "I mean, of course, any personal grudge that she may have."

Henrietta gave way again.

A personal grudge! She would not have cared a jot for a personal grudge. But oh dear! Would *every one* cut her? Was she to be an outcast? Would people refuse to know her?

"Jessie was right," she sobbed. "She said they would! She said they would! But I didn't believe her! How should I? I—I wouldn't be—uncharitable—like that."

"Your sister disapproved then?" he enquired. "She thought this — this change a — a little premature?"

"Hateful! Unkind!" sobbed Mrs Harris. "I couldn't have done such a thing—to *anybody*—whatever any one had done. And they'll *all* be the same!"

Again he began to feel worried.

"It should take a good deal certainly to justify a public insult," he said gloomily.

"Oh!" she wailed, and pressing her handkerchief to her face, she rocked to and fro.

"Do drink a little tea," he urged. "It's getting cold. I think you would be calmer if you did."

She made an heroic effort to collect herself, impelled by a fear of what she might say next, and lifting the cup in a trembling hand she sipped the tea. It checked her sobbing, and she drank a little more.

"Oh dear, what a fool I am!" she said, smiling feebly. "And how good you have been to me."

"Don't say that," he said. "I only want to see you more calm."

She dabbed her hot cheeks with her handkerchief.

"What a sight I must look," she sighed.

"Won't you drink some more," he suggested.

She obeyed, and then putting down the cup, she looked at him across the little table with apologetic eyes.

"Of course, it's ridiculous to mind so much," she said. "But it was such a shock! So unexpected!"

He was relieved again; her sincerity was obvious. Whatever one might suspect, her surprise was undoubted, and that in itself was a proof of innocence.

"Do you really think that what you said just now can have been the reason?" he asked.

She did not like telling a downright lie; an implied falsehood seemed so much less false, and she evaded giving a direct answer.

"It hardly seems enough to account for it, does it?" she said anxiously. "But of course she was fond of my husband—some people were, you know—and I'm afraid she knew that I—I was not very happy with him."

"Were you not?"

Doubt of her again rose in his mind, and she perceived it.

"No," she said hastily; "and it seemed to me a mockery to be wearing such deep mourning. It was professing more than I felt. Why should I put on outward signs of sorrow which I did not, *could* not feel, just because convention required it? And I was not to blame," she added. "I was not, indeed. Forgive me for telling you this, but I—I should not like you to misjudge me."

The tears filled her big grey eyes, and she looked pleadingly into his face. Her prettiness made his pulses beat fast. The thought of making her his wife bewildered his judgment, and he felt doubt of her to be impossible.

"You see, I had been unhappy at home," she explained. "I don't want you to think anything against my people—only they—they are different to me; and I married when I was very young, partly because I thought it would mean—more happiness, and I did respect him *then*. Besides, my people wanted it because he was well off. Then, when it was done—I found out too late that life with him was—was hideous! And they did not see or understand or help me. I had no one to go to! I was absolutely alone. Of course," she added piteously, "I don't expect you to take my word. I know I ought not to have—to have talked

to you without an introduction. And I'm afraid you must think me . . . I—I don't know what you must think!"

Goulburn leant across the table.

"Don't—don't say that," he said ardently.

"I—I've often thought since how—how wrong you must have thought me, but if you only knew how unhappy I was then, and it's so dull being unhappy—just after the first."

"If it comes to that," cried Goulburn, "it is I who should apologise. But I assure you I never for one moment thought you—anything but what you are. I ought not to have dared to address you! I know it, but I too was lonely. And I had seen you the day before—believe me, such things *do* happen—and I vowed then that if ever any woman should be my wife, it should be you. And by hook or by crook I was determined to know you. If you had repelled me, God knows what I should have done! If you repel me now—— Good God! What am I saying? I have no right to speak to you like this! You know nothing about me."

A radiant happiness softened Henrietta's eyes, but she shrank back with genuine diffidence.

"But neither do you know anything about me," she said.

His brain whirled! Hang it all! How could he have doubted her for one moment! If only he could get rid of the idea that that old hag of a doctor's wife had known something about *him*.

"Do you think I care for that!" he cried. "Have I not seen your face, and heard you speak? That is enough for me."

She drooped her head in silence. Then she glanced at him shyly, and whispered under her breath:

"And for me, too."

CHAPTER VIII

"I WONDER how much I ought to tell Jessie," said Henrietta. Their two chairs were now side by side, and he held her hand.

"You think it would look better if I met her first?" he said, pulling his moustache with his free hand. "I'm inclined to agree. Except that we want as little delay as possible, don't we?"

"You see," said Henrietta, "there really is very little confidence between her and me. She isn't exactly sympathetic, and I get into the habit of not telling her things."

He hesitated a minute.

"You mean you haven't mentioned me to her?"

She shook her head.

"I really—*shirked* it," she said with a gay little laugh. "You see, as long as she didn't know what you were like she couldn't tell what I had had to go by, and Jessie—well, Jessie is like most elder sisters; she has no opinion of my discretion."

"It's the way of elder brothers too," he said.

She glanced at him with sympathy.

"Have *you* a brother like that?"

"Oh, well, you know," he said lightly, "I have always been the black sheep of my family."

"Have you really?" she cried with delight. "That's just what I've been."

She took her hand away from him, and resting her

elbows on the table, she propped her chin on her clasped fingers.

"When shall you tell your brother?" she asked.

"Ah! that's the question," he said. "As far as I'm concerned the sooner I tell him the better. By George! he'll be surprised! It ought to please him too. He's always wanted me to settle down, but till *now* I haven't felt disposed to oblige him."

Henrietta flushed, and smiled with shy amusement.

"I should like to meet your brother," she said.

Goulburn felt a little uneasy. This presented something of a predicament, for how could Dick Goulburn be the brother of Francis Smith? It would have to be thought out, and if there were no other way Dick would have to remain ostensibly implacable.

"I hope you will meet very soon," he said, "but——"

"But what?"

"Dick's a queer customer," he explained. "You see, I once got on the wrong side of him, and I've never yet been able to get right with him again. But I'm doing all I can to make it easy for him to forget the part he played in the past. It is I who am making the first move. Still, you must not be surprised if it comes to nothing."

"Is he your only brother?"

"My only one," he said. "I had a sister once, but she is dead, and my father and mother are both dead too."

Henrietta regarded him with grave sympathy.

"How dreadful of your brother to quarrel with you when there are only you two left," she said. "I don't think I could ever *really* quarrel with Jessie, however provoking and unsympathetic she were. For one thing, I should always remember our playing together and doing things together when we were little." She reflected for an instant, and then added: "It's funny,

though I'm sometimes so angry with her that I almost think I hate her, yet I know I'm really fond of her all the time. I sometimes think simply being accustomed to people makes one like them. I wish though we hadn't got to tell her how we met. It can't be helped, of course, and no one else need ever know."

"Unless *she* should tell them," he suggested.

"Oh, she wouldn't do that," said Mrs Harris positively. "She'll say disagreeable things to me, and she probably won't be very cordial to you, but she won't tell any one else. I'm quite sure of that."

"I think I shall go down to Boltons to-morrow to see Dick," he said, "unless that hurries *you* too much. What do you think?"

She gazed at him dubiously and did not answer at once. Then she said disconsolately:

"It's very odd how different things sound to what they really are. I mean, if you sum anything up in a sentence, and leave out all the details, it sounds dreadful. For instance, if any one said about us 'Oh, they picked up acquaintance on the beach at Sandgate,' no one would think we were the sort of people we are, would they?"

"Once we are married, darling," he murmured, "no one will ask how we met."

She smiled contentedly.

"No, that's quite true."

They were both silent for a little.

"My dream is a house in the country," he said presently, "somewhere where there are pleasant neighbours."

"Yes," she agreed, "I should like that too."

"London is such a whirlpool," he said. "The individual gets swamped. No one has time to attend to any one else."

"And then, of course, we could go to town for a visit

if we wanted," she said. "Besides, we will have people down to stay with us."

"Intercourse with one's fellow-creatures always seems to me so much more satisfactory when it is leisurely," he remarked.

They both pondered a little over a vision of their future home, and the pleasures of acting as host and hostess. He intended to acquire a reputation for an admirably ordered establishment, and Henrietta was already dreaming of a scheme of colour for her drawing-room.

"I suppose it's necessary to wait till the year of mourning is over," she said with a sigh.

He stroked his moustache thoughtfully with his curved hand, frowning with an air of slight dissatisfaction.

"Hang it all!" he said. "*I don't want* to wait. But I suppose it wouldn't do to hurry it. You can't depend upon people overlooking a thing of that sort."

Henrietta stared at the table.

"I don't know that it would matter much if they didn't," she said.

"Not matter?" he enquired.

"Well, no," she said; "you see it would only be *my* acquaintances who would mind, and all the people I know are associated with my husband. And really, I think I should like to leave everything to do with the past behind me and make a completely fresh start."

"And depend on making new friends?" he asked doubtfully.

"Well, you know, wherever we settle people will call on us," she said.

He smiled at her.

"I ask nothing better than to be married at once," he said.

It occurred to Henrietta that she was possibly a

little over eager, and this distressed her. Her lips quivered, and tears filled her eyes.

"Dearest," he cried, "what is it?"

He edged his chair closer to her and tried to take her hands from under her chin.

"Don't—don't!" she said tearfully.

"But tell me!" he urged. "What is it? What is troubling you?"

"My life has been so wretched lately," she apologised shamefacedly. "Unhappiness seems to—to undermine one's—one's self-respect."

"My darling," he murmured, "think how happy we will be in the future. I, too, have been a lonely dog. Let's forget all that's gone before."

She nodded soberly.

"I've no wish to remember anything."

She let him take her hands now, and he pressed first one to his lips and then the other.

Again they were silent for some minutes.

Then Henrietta remarked:

"If you go and see your brother to-morrow I shall have to tell Jessie."

"It certainly would be as well that she should know soon; as soon as you think advisable. I trust to your diplomacy."

"But I have none!" she protested. "I really haven't. Jessie is certain to say something that will make me angry, and then I always give myself away. And I know I shall do that now."

"I wish I could spare you," he sighed. "Shall I put off going to Boltons?"

"I don't know. No," said Mrs Harris. "Better get it over. Besides, I don't think I can help telling her. I wonder, though"—she half laughed—"if you will have as bad a time as I shall."

"Oh, Dick can be uncommon nasty," said Goulburn. "Still, he is a good sort at bottom."

"That's just what I feel about Jessie."

"He's a slave to convention, you know. A perfect slave to it. He's no liberty of opinion."

Henrietta nodded.

"And it's so difficult to live with people like that," she said.

"Of course, convention is a good thing as far as it goes," he continued. "But unless one is *able* to disregard it, one is no better than a mere puppet. There are moments—and those moments are the crises of one's life—when one must judge for oneself, and act accordingly."

"Yes, that is true," said Henrietta. "It seems to me that a thing may be considered quite wrong, and in fact generally be wrong, and yet in certain circumstances may be really right."

"And then one has to face disapproval," he said. "As long as one acts according to the accepted conventions people will be friendly. They know what to be at. They understand what you are, and what you are doing; but they won't forgive you if your action is against the rules. To act according to one's own opinion is often a severe self-sacrifice. But I'm all for maintaining, as far as possible, a good understanding with the rest of the world."

"Then do you think——" Henrietta hesitated.

"Think what?" he asked.

"Do you think that this is a moment for acting independently?"

"Upon the whole, I think it is," he said. "Afterwards it will be quite another thing."

CHAPTER IX

DICK GOULBURN lived in what had once been the old Manor House at Boltons, which his great-grandfather, a merchant-tailor and alderman of London, had bought early in the eighteenth century. The house had been altered by each generation, and it was now a comfortable country dwelling of modern aspect, with spacious low rooms and large windows. Roses, clematis, and virginia-creeper were trained up the white walls and over the verandah ; a trim drive between flat meadows led up to the front door ; but behind the house the flower-garden was still surrounded by its ancient red walls, and kept much of its old-world air of sedateness. Fine old trees edging the meadow-land shut in the little estate upon all sides.

In spite of the fact that Dick Goulburn lived here alone, every room was kept aired and ready for use. He disliked the desolation of a closed room, and yet, except by chance, no one was ever asked to stay there. It was against all his habits of mind to sit down and send a written invitation for a stated date.

After dinner, on the evening which followed Frank Goulburn's proposal to Henrietta, Dick was sitting reading in the library at Boltons. He was a short, sturdy man, with an appearance of being almost aggressively clean and well-groomed. He leant back stiffly in his leather arm-chair, his knees apart, his feet drawn in, and he was holding his book up before his

eyes with both hands. The lamp stood on a table at his side, and the light shone down on his straight red hair and blunt features, which were weather-beaten to a permanent dull brick colour. Except for two little tufts by his ears he was clean-shaven.

The front-door bell rang, and he glanced up quickly with an air of surprise. His eyes were blue, bright, humorous, and exceedingly alert.

There was a sound of voices outside, and the door of the room opened softly. Timis, the old servant, who had lived many years with the late Mr Goulburn, entered and came towards him. His red, square face, surrounded by white hair, was deprecating; his respectable black-clad figure, stooping at the shoulders and slightly bent at the knees, was apologetic in every line.

"It's Mr Francis, sir," he said nervously, and not looking at his master. "He would like to speak to you."

"Who?" asked Dick.

"Mr Frank, sir," said Timis, and lowering his voice, he added: "Mr Frank Goulburn, sir."

Dick sat upright and stared at him.

"You don't say so!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir. Mr Frank, sir."

"God bless my soul!" said Dick, still staring at the old servant who was apprehensively passing one hand over the other. Then after a moment he repeated: "You say he wants to see me?"

"Yes, sir."

Dick stroked his chin.

"He does, does he? Well, I'm damned!"

"Shall I say you will see him, sir," suggested Timis, with an air of hinting that it would be hard-hearted to refuse.

"Yes, tell him to come in. No, wait a bit!" He bounded up. "I'll go to him myself."

He crossed the room to the door, and then hesitated, and turned back to Timis.

"Just see that a room is all right for him. He'll probably stay the night. And I say, Timis."

"Yes, sir."

"Better remember that he is Mr Smith when you speak of him to the other servants."

"Yes, sir."

Dick went out into the dark hall; it was lit only by a single lamp standing on the oak table.

Frank, his hands in his pockets, was strolling about, peering up at the pictures. As he heard the door open he turned sharply round.

Dick held out his hand in silence; Frank strode forward and seized it effusively.

"Come into the library, won't you?" said Dick, and his brother followed him in without a word.

Dick turned to him.

"Have you dined? Will you have something?"

Frank waved his hand with a gesture of dissent.

"No, no—nothing! Nothing at all, thanks," he said, and sank down upon a small, upright chair with a profound, tremulous sigh, passing his hand over his forehead. "You kept me waiting long enough," he complained. "I thought you were going to turn me out."

"Bosh!" said Dick bluntly, his frigid politeness giving way. He remained standing, his feet planted far apart, his hands stuffed deep into his trouser pockets.

Frank glanced up at him.

"You don't say you're glad to see me," he remarked.

A gleam of amusement shone in his brother's eyes.

"I'll tell you how glad I am later on," he said, and he seated himself abruptly in his big leather chair, his

hands resting on his knees. "Cut along! Let's hear what you've got to say."

"You've not changed much," said Frank sullenly.

"Ah, now! Have *you*?" asked Dick, raising his eyebrows and jerking his chin forward.

Frank stretched out his feet and drew them in again. He avoided Dick's eyes and looked ostentatiously round the room.

"By George! To think of being back in the old place again!" he sighed. "You don't seem to realise what it means to me after—how many years of exile?"

He got up and walked to the mantelpiece to gaze at the half-length portrait of his mother, a sandy-haired woman with strong features, wearing a pale grey gown. His bearing was uneasy.

He went back and stood in front of Dick.

"You ask if I've changed," he said. "Well, yes, I have, and that's why I'm here." He took hold of the chair he had left, and planting it nearer to Dick he sat down. He leant forward, speaking hurriedly: "I've had enough of roving. I'm sick to death of knocking about out of England. When all is said and done I am an Englishman, and my right place is in England."

"Well?" said Dick.

"Well, I've come back," said Frank, "and I want to stay."

"Here?" enquired Dick.

His laconic coolness was irritating; all the more, because Frank believed that it was intended to irritate, and in spite of himself his brother's manner made him feel small. However, he made an effort to control himself.

"Do I want to stay here?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Well, no; upon the whole I think not. I love the dear old place, God knows! still——"

Dick continued to regard him with an unmoved countenance, and said nothing to help him.

Frank lost his temper.

"Damn you, you are as cold-blooded as a reptile!" he said with a look of ferocious resentment.

"My dear fellow, I am listening," said Dick. "What more do you expect?"

"Upon my word——" began Frank passionately, and then checked himself. "I must say you do display a nice fraternal spirit," he went on with bitterness, but speaking more quietly. "Can't you let bygones be bygones? A nice charitable way you have of helping a fellow to right himself. I suppose, according to your code, if a man has once kicked over the traces he's damned for ever. And what's more, if you were not as narrow-minded as an old woman, you'd see the difference between a stupid, cur-like doing of an unlawful act believing it to be wrong, and ashamed of yourself all the time, and the doing of it in a reasoned and courageous way, because you've come to the conclusion that right and wrong are purely arbitrary terms."

He drew his chair a little nearer and began to speak more eagerly.

"Mind you, I acknowledge that it was not expedient just now. It was unlawful, and having thought things out, I've come to the conclusion a man should abide by the law, because it's the best we've got for the time being. Mind you, my principles are the same, but I've come to acknowledge that a compromise is necessary, and I'm ready to conform to the requirements of the social state. And that's what I've come to say."

Dick's eyes twinkled.

"I see," he said. "It's—it's a great concession on your part."

"Of course, I won't say that my experiences have

not had some effect upon me," said Frank. "I've had a rough time of it on the whole, and—you may call me sentimental if you like, I can't help it—I've been confoundedly homesick! There's no other word for it. And now"—he shifted his chair still nearer as he spoke—"now times have changed; *I* have changed; people have forgotten; and I want to come back! I want to start fresh. I want to have a home, an English home! A comfortable little country house with——" He swallowed his words, and went on hurriedly to another sentence. "Dick, old chap, will you help me to realise my little dream? Think what it means to me! Another three hundred a year would make everything simple. It's not very much after all—five hundred altogether—but it would make all the difference to me. It would pave my way to becoming a useful and respected member of society. It would enable *me* to respect myself again, to forget the past as if it had never been."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Dick, staring at him.

"Dick, old fellow——" He hesitated. "Dick—I—I'm engaged to be married."

"What!!" Dick bounded forward in his chair and grasped the arms with his short, wide hands.

"Yes, I—I am." Frank laughed feebly, and in the oppression of his anxiety he heaved another tremulous sigh and passed his hand over his forehead. Then he began again. "By heaven, Dick, I wish you could see her! She would give you confidence in me. A man who had a wife like that, wouldn't risk—a—anything that could damage *her*. On my honour, if you will help me now, Dick, it'll be the saving of me! It will indeed!"

"The devil it will!" said Dick.

"She's a widow—a Mrs Henderson; but quite young and very pretty," said Frank rapidly. "She's staying at Sandgate with her sister, Miss Prout."

Then he waited to see what effect his information would have.

Dick Goulburn slid slowly back on the seat of his chair until he was again settled in its depths. Here was a pretty kettle of fish! Frank on the scenes again, having turned up without a word of warning! Surprising! Yes, but on the whole it was pretty much what might have been expected. He was bound to try it on sooner or later. And under the circumstances, Frank was showing up better than could have been foreseen. True, he asked for more money, but obviously it would not be wise for him to attempt a profession. Questions would be asked; and who could tell how his new-found honesty would face the possible temptations. Two hundred a year was certainly not enough to support a wife and family. Ah, yes! but *that* was the point! A wife! Frank married, if you please! How about that? *That* was quite another pair of shoes.

"Look here, Frank," he said, "have you told her?"

"Told her what?" replied Frank quickly.

"Certainly, I—I've asked her to marry me, if that's what you mean."

"Have you told her about yourself?" asked Dick leaning forward and raising his eyebrows. "Have you told her that you've been in prison, and what for?"

Frank turned a little sideways, and calmly crossing his legs, he rested one arm on the back of his chair.

"No, I have not," he replied boldly; "and I don't intend to."

"But, man alive," cried Dick in great excitement, "you must!"

"Must?"

"You can't let a young woman *marry* you knowing nothing about you! Good heavens, man, if she's to take you for better or worse you've no right to hide a thing like that from her! God bless my soul! A young, innocent, trusting woman!"

Frank settled himself straight upon his chair and leant forward, speaking earnestly.

"Now look here, Dick, just consider this quietly and reasonably. No, let me speak. Think what the bearings of the case really are, and don't fix upon the obvious aspect as if no other side existed. Why should I tell her my past? It *is* past, and it's nothing to do with me now. Why should she know what I once did? I shall never do such a thing again. *I* know that, but she could not know it in the same way. She would at once see in me the same man as the man who served a sentence in prison, instead of realising how much has gone to change me in these years. I am no more that man now than you are. She would not trust me; and I *know* myself worthy of trust even from the most conventional person. If I tell her, probably she will refuse to marry me, and we shall both be made unhappy to no purpose. On the other hand, if I say nothing, she will marry me as I now am, and as I shall be in the future,—the man she knows and cares for. I shall realise my little dream of happiness, and I shall have a chance at last, such as I have never had, of living a normal life."

"That's all very well," said Dick stubbornly, "but if a man chooses to do what is unlawful he has to pay the penalty of being suspected by law-abiding citizens. You have no right whatever to let her marry you in ignorance."

Frank began to tremble inwardly with exasperation and emotion.

"Her knowing or not knowing is beside the question. The kind of man I now am is the kind she has agreed to marry," he insisted, "and I'm ready to spend my life in making her happy."

"It's not beside the question!" shouted Dick. "Why—why," he went on, "a man who, at any time of his life, has been capable of—of fraud, has something in his character which led him to do it, and it's not fair to a woman to let her marry that man without knowing whom she has to deal with."

"Good God! Can't you believe in your own brother!" cried Frank.

Dick did not answer at once, but scrutinised Frank with a slightly amused look. After a minute he said slowly:

"Well, I think I do believe in you. At any rate, to this extent. If you'll tell her——"

"Tcha!" Frank turned away with an angry, inarticulate sound.

"If you'll make a clean breast of it," continued Dick, "and she will still have you, why, then I'll give you the extra three hundred."

There was a dead silence.

Frank scowled at the floor, and made no reply. What on earth was the use of an offer like that? Of course, she would not have him if she knew. What woman would? And Dick must be aware of that! Oh, of course, he knew it. It was like his closefistedness. *He* knew that his money was safe enough on those terms. It was incredible, monstrous meanness! And unwarrantable interference, too! What right had he to impose any condition? After all, as the son of the same father, Frank had a certain claim to the money. But it was just like Dick to take a base advantage when he could. And Frank had been fool enough to think that Dick would be glad to give him a helping hand! His very eagerness

had deluded him into hoping. Good heavens! To be so near happiness—so near, and to lose it all! The image of Henrietta rose before his mind's eye, and he could have shed tears like a thwarted child.

"Damn you!" he wailed.

There was another silence between them.

"By the way," enquired Dick presently, "does Mrs Henderson know you as Smith or Goulburn?"

"Smith," said Frank sulkily.

"How did you intend to explain my name?" asked Dick. "Not quite plain sailing there, I think."

"What does it matter what I was going to do?" said Frank. "I did tell her I was coming to see my brother, but I shall let her know that you don't mean to lift a finger to help us. I don't know how much fortune she has, but if she cares enough to make it do with what I can earn——"

Dick leapt to his feet.

"Then——"

Frank also rose.

"I mean to marry her," he said stubbornly.

"And not tell her?"

"And not tell her," repeated Frank.

"Then I shall!" shouted Dick, his face crimson.

Frank turned white.

"She won't believe you," he said.

Dick cooled down again.

"Come, Frank," he said. "You'd better accept my offer. It's rot to say she won't believe me. She's got to believe. There's too much proof against you."

Frank sat down with a groan and covered his face with his hands.

"I *can't* see why you want to do it," he complained. "You might just as well push a drowning man under water when he sees a chance of saving himself. Fool that I was! I thought you were humane enough to be glad."

"My dear boy, so I am. So I would be! But it's not fair to her," said Dick. "And I—I can't let a woman, a young, innocent, trusting woman——"

"Oh, shut up, for God's sake!" groaned Frank. "I tell you I love her."

"Look here, Frank, go and plead your own cause with her. It will be the most indisputable proof of your feeling for her. And then if she'll have you, why, you'll have won her fairly. Besides, there's this to think of. Supposing you did marry her without telling her, there would always be the danger of her finding out afterwards."

"I'd risk that," cried Frank eagerly.

"Well, I won't," said Dick bluntly. "What do you suppose she'd feel like when she found herself tied to a husband who had been in prison for——"

Frank started up.

"Can't you see you are driving me mad!" he cried, and he began to stride up and down the room. "If I didn't care for her—if it was only the wish to settle down, it would be another thing. But it's *both*. You don't seem able to take that in, and in my opinion it makes all the difference."

"My dear fellow, you may talk till all is blue, but I shall not alter my mind," said Dick.

Frank stopped in front of him.

"With such a condition attached, five hundred pounds a year is not enough," he said.

"Bosh!" said Dick abruptly.

Frank recognised that he was beaten. He knew Dick too well to hope to change him, and he hastily cast about in his mind for the best method of telling Henrietta. A vague announcement of his general theory of morals, the youthful, hot-blooded attempt to put it into practice, the falseness of the justice which punishes the failures and honours the successful—yes, all this could help him. And then it was

so long ago, so very long ago. Who has not sowed wild oats in his youth? Certainly, no man who was worth his salt. But any way he must tell her before she could see Dick. He must prepare her mind a little for the—the eccentric person that Dick was, the sort of rough diamond. He would get back to Sandgate as soon as possible.

He stopped in his hasty walk.

"I suppose you're right, old fellow," he acknowledged with a little laugh. "I can't help having sympathy, though, with the chap who said that all was fair in love and war."

"You'll tell her, then?"

"Yes, I'll tell her," he sighed profoundly. "I'll tell her," he sighed again. "Shake hands, old fellow," he added suddenly, claiming congratulation for his moral victory.

CHAPTER X

THE next morning Dick Goulburn came down to the dining-room punctually at half-past eight. The windows which led into the garden were wide open. At a little distance the tree-tops shuddered and swayed in the wind, but the walled garden was sheltered, and only a light, fitful whiff of air lifted the window curtains.

The newspaper lay on the sideboard ; two or three letters, a memorandum-book, pen, ink, notepaper and envelopes were arranged beside his cup and plate on a large brass tray at one end of the table.

He rang the bell, and Timis appeared with eggs and the coffee.

"You've only laid for me, Timis," said Dick.

"Yes, sir ; Mr Frank has gone, sir."

"Gone !"

"Yes, sir. He said that he'd important business that called him away immediate," explained the old servant. "Yes, important business ; that's what he said. And he said he was sorry not to see you before he left, sir, but he hoped to be back again soon."

"When did he go ?"

"Not more than scarcely half an hour back, sir. Yes, sir ; he said he hoped to be back again soon."

Dick was ruffled. Gone, had he ? What on earth

was he in such a hurry for? He might just as well have waited to have breakfast, or at any rate to see his brother. However, gone he was, and there was nothing to do but put up with it.

Dick Goulburn sat down, and, opening his letters, he set about answering them with precipitation, and in the shortest possible form, regardless of the fact that the post did not leave till the evening.

Until his correspondence was off his mind he could not give undivided attention to anything else. He was both impatient and punctilious, and on receiving a letter he was possessed by an urgent desire to express his reply at once, as if the information were conveyed to his correspondent as soon as it was written, while the thought of an unanswered letter disturbed him with a sense of having been discourteous. In the intervals of having breakfast he accepted an invitation to dine with Colonel Mitcham, and another to stay for a week with the Bellinghams in Hertfordshire; he had subscribed to an orphanage, and composed a reply to a letter from Tony Saunderson, answering his questions in order and giving miscellaneous items of news in abrupt, bald sentences.

He closed and stamped the last envelope, poured out another cup of coffee, and leaning back in his chair his thoughts then returned to Frank with mingled vexation and amusement.

This hasty departure looked amiss. Of course he had agreed to tell her, but who could know how much or what he would say? Unfortunately, one could never take it for granted that Frank would do the straight thing. All the same, it was beastly hard luck on him, for the poor chap was obviously in love with her.

"I'd give a good deal not to have to put a spoke in his wheel," he thought regretfully. Then he

chuckled suddenly; it was ludicrous to think of Frank hankering after respectability. But what was to be done? Knowing the sort of man he was, one could not let the girl marry him in ignorance. Indeed, as the matter stood, some further step ought to be taken. What guarantee had he, even with Frank's promise to tell her, that this poor young woman would not be grossly deceived? Dick grew red at the thought of it, and he struck the table with his fist. Monstrous! Monstrous! An innocent young woman trustfully binding herself for life to—oh, it was not to be thought of! It must not be allowed! And the responsibility lay with him, Dick Goulburn! *He* knew the circumstances! *He* knew what a slippery customer he had to deal with! Clearly, it was *his* duty to see to it that she did not run into this with her eyes shut. Interference? Interference be damned! Of course it was interference, and probably she would not thank him for it, any more than Frank would, but it was a question of right and wrong, of—of common humanity!

But how was it to be done? That was the trouble. Should he write to this Mrs—Mrs Henderson?

Write to her? Confound it, no! That was the very last thing he felt disposed to do. A letter was the very devil!

Then what? Was he to go and see her? It looked uncommonly like it. Indeed that seemed to be about the only alternative. And in that case—— Should he write and ask for an appointment? No, that was not safe enough. Frank might get round him even then. This was an occasion for prompt attention.

What if he went to-day—now—at once!

He started up and rang the bell.

"Timis," he said, as soon as the old man appeared in the doorway. "The time-table, and pack my bag."

Suddenly he struck the palm of his left hand with his right fist.

"Better still!" he thought. "There's the sister."

Now, what had Frank said was her name? A rather short name beginning with *P*. Mrs Henderson and her sister—— Prout! That was it. Miss Prout. Of course she would be the right person to speak to. No doubt she was, as it were, *in loco parentis*. And *she* would not be in love; that was a great point.

But the address? Oh, that would be simple enough. Sandgate was about the size of a pocket-handkerchief. Any of the tradespeople would be able to tell him where they were lodging.

Half an hour later Dick Goulburn was on his way to the station.

Meanwhile, Henrietta had put off her interview with Jessie until the last minute possible. She knew that unless she heard to the contrary she was to expect Mr Smith back some time on this day, and therefore when the morning's post brought her no letter from him, she braced herself to face Jessie's uncompromising criticism. Ever since she had parted from Frank she had been absorbed in preparing various ways of broaching the subject, but whenever she had tried to bring herself to the point of speaking, sheer fright had paralysed her brain. There was no doubt, however one might express it, it was an exceedingly awkward affair to give an account of. Now, however, that she could not put it off any longer, she made a desperate effort to remain collected.

She spent half the morning sitting by the table, nervously following the pattern of the table-cloth with the end of a pen-holder, and trying to think of what to say. Jessie, seated in an arm-chair near the window, was darning stockings.

All at once Henrietta remarked abruptly :

"Jessie, a—a friend, a Mr Smith is coming to call."

Jessie looked up with a startled air.

"What did you say?"

"A—a friend—is coming to call—here—on us," repeated Henrietta jerkily. "His name is Smith."

She gave a little laugh. "Not very aristocratic, is it?"

Jessie's heart sank with vague but profound misgiving.

"Mr Smith? What Mr Smith?" she asked.

"He's a friend of mine," said Henrietta.

Jessie considered for a minute.

"I don't think I ever heard you mention him," she said doubtfully.

"No," said Henrietta calmly.

"Isn't it rather a mistake to have asked him to come *here*, and—and *now*," said Jessie, with chilling emphasis. "I presume you did not know him well, as I have never heard of him."

"He's very nice," replied Henrietta.

"That is rather beside the point," said Jessie.

"I don't see why you should call it a mistake," continued Henrietta. "I should have thought you would have been glad to see any one. I'm sure I am."

Jessie's pale face flushed.

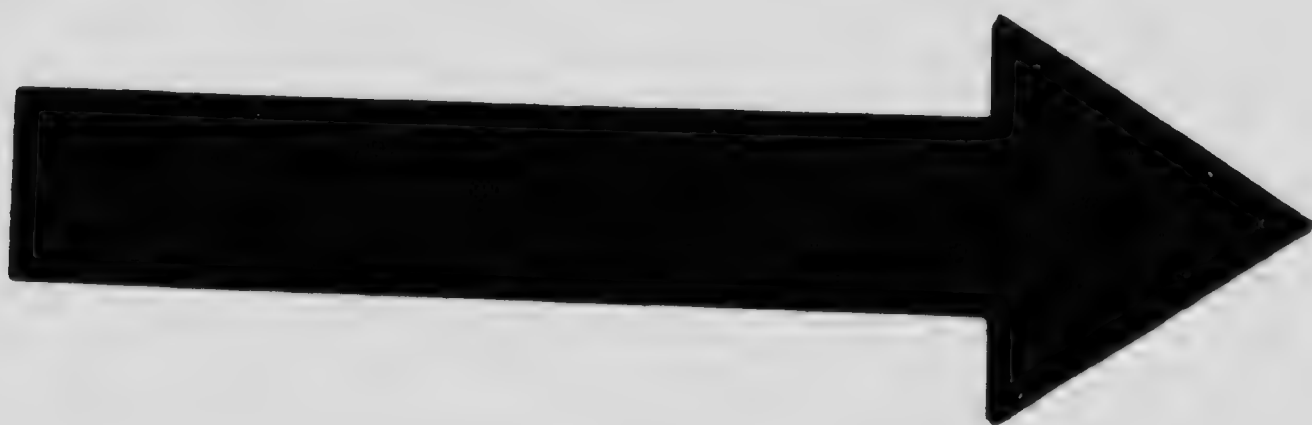
"I don't feel as if I could look any one in the face again," she said in a low voice, and Henrietta winced. She pressed the end of the pen-holder into a tiny hole in the cloth and worked it round and round.

"Jessie," she pleaded.

"Well?"

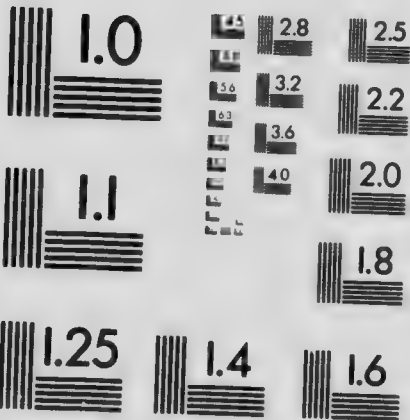
"Jessie, can't you forget what I said—the other day?"

Jessie did not answer, but as the silence endured, it horrified her. She could not say that she felt the same towards Henrietta, or ever would, and yet her conscience reproached her with the cruelty of her



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muteness, and the longer the silence lasted, the more painfully significant it seemed to her. In her agitation she said the first thing that came into her head:

"When is this Mr Smith coming?"

Henrietta was deeply hurt, but she assumed an air of indifference as if she had not spoken.

"To-day, I believe," she answered.

Jessie waited for further information, and as her sister said no more, she enquired distrustfully:

"How did he know we were here?"

"I met him."

"What—here? Then he is staying here?"

"Yes."

Jessie was exasperated.

"My dear Henrietta, you must tell me something more about him. When and where did you get to know him? What does he do? Was he a friend of—of John's? How is it I've never heard of him before?"

"That is quite easy to explain," said Henrietta in a hard voice, looking Jessie full in the face. "John never knew him. Nor did I, till about ten days ago."

"Henrietta! What do you mean?"

Jessie's hands, one enveloped in a black stocking, the other brandishing the needle, were tremulous; her lips were parted in dismay.

Henrietta looked down. When she presently raised her eyes, her expression was confidential.

"I will tell you how it happened from the beginning," she said. "I know it sounds rather odd, but really it was quite all right, because he's—well—he's a gentleman, to put it baldly. You see, I dropped my umbrella——"

"Well?"

"I dropped it on the esplanade, and he picked it up."

"Yes."

"He happened to be passing, you see, and he asked me if I were Mrs Williams. She was somebody he once knew, and he said I was like her."

"You mean," said Jessie scathingly, "that you have scraped acquaintance with heaven knows who, and that now you have asked him to come here?"

Henrietta's eyes flashed.

"You have no right to speak like that until you have heard more," she exclaimed. "Also you are not competent to judge when you have not seen him."

"A man you know absolutely nothing about!" cried Jessie.

"Again, I say, wait till you see him."

"I cannot believe that a man who would—without an introduction—— Good Heavens, Henrietta, what *can* he think of you?" cried Jessie, her face burning.

Henrietta started to her feet, and came to the window.

"It's absurd to talk like that when you don't know anything about it. It's worse than absurd."

"Of course, I have no cause to be surprised," interrupted Jessie bitterly, "but I had tried to think that there was some excuse for all the—the frivolity you yourself acknowledged at the trial—I tried to think that they made it sound worse than it was."

"And there were excuses!" cried Henrietta vehemently. "And there are now! Haven't you made my life a burden to me? The very way you are behaving now is an excuse! But no excuse is wanted. If you had any sympathy, any imagination, you would understand. It all happened so simply. *You* would have done the same."

"*Never!*" said Jessie with tight lips.

"If you were *human* you would! If you were

not a heartless prude, you would!" cried Henrietta passionately. "But because *my* feelings are not the same as yours, you take it for granted that they are bad. I daresay it was unconventional, but you drove me to do it! Anyway *now* I don't care what any one chooses to say or think about me—I am going to be happy in spite of you all. You needn't see Mr Smith if you are too particular, but I may as well tell you I'm going to marry him!"

"*Henrietta!*" Jessie pulled the stocking off her hand and threw it into her work-basket. She rose quickly. "You are not serious?" she said.

"Yes, but I am," said Henrietta.

"You cannot mean that you are engaged to him?"

Henrietta nodded, half smiling. A slight flush rose to her cheeks; her eyes became soft and shining.

"Since when?" demanded Jessie.

"Since the day before yesterday."

Jessie put her hands over her face and burst into tears of bitter mortification. She sat down again and bowed her head almost on to her knees, shaken by long sobs.

"*Jessie!*" cried Henrietta in dismay, and falling on her knees by her sister she tried to pull away her hands from before her face. "*Jessie, Jessie!—don't! Oh, do speak to me! Don't, don't cry like that!*"

But Jessie pushed her away, and continued to sob violently. Henrietta was much disturbed. She too was on the verge of tears. She had expected reproaches and taunts, and though reproaches and taunts would have wounded her and made her angry, still it was possible to answer what was said. But she could not justify herself against tears; she did not know exactly why Jessie was crying, and she began to experience a shrinking fear that she really had committed an enormity. She leant against the

shutter of the window mutely looking out, both wishing and dreading that Jessie would say something. The silence, only broken by the sound of her sobbing, was harrowing.

Presently Jessie took out her handkerchief, and, wiping her eyes, tried to control her sobs. For a long time she remained leaning back in her chair in silence, pressing her handkerchief to her lips, and gazing in front of her with tear-suffused eyes.

At last she spoke.

"Have you told this Mr Smith who you are?" she asked very quietly.

Henrietta glanced at her furtively.

"No," she said.

"Of course you will?" said Jessie.

There was a short pause.

"I don't see how it concerns you," replied Henrietta in a low voice.

"It concerns me to this extent," said Jessie. "I know, and therefore I have a certain responsibility. I have no right to stand by and let him marry you in ignorance."

"I shall never do such a thing again," said Henrietta swiftly.

"But you *have* done it, and you must tell him if you mean to marry him."

Henrietta felt that all her pulses were beating distressingly fast, and she began to lose control of her ideas.

"The past is past," she said uncertainly. "Don't you see I—I—I— this means starting a new life; and I do so want to—to begin again." Her lip quivered a moment, but she forced back her tears. "I do so want to be—happy."

"But, Henrietta," objected Jessie earnestly, "you cannot really hope to be happy with this man. You know nothing whatever about him."

"I do! I know a great deal. I know enough to—
to care."

"You only know what he has told you. You cannot always take a person at his own valuation." Again there was a momentary pause.

"Perhaps not," said Henrietta, "but in this case I am willing to take the risk."

"Has it occurred to you," suggested Jessie, speaking slowly, "that he is running the same risk with regard to you, and possibly——"

"It is what I am now that matters to him," said Henrietta.

"You have no conscience," said Jessie.

"Again, I say that is no concern of yours," answered Henrietta, still speaking very quietly. "I believe that my sense of what is right is all the more sincere because it is not conventional."

"Your sense of right and wrong seems to me a little too elastic to be called sincere," remarked Jessie, the colour coming into her cheeks.

Henrietta also flushed.

"Don't you think we might put an end to this discussion?" she said loftily. "I mean to go my own way in this matter. Of course, if you do not choose to see him I can easily tell him so."

Jessie did not reply for some moments. Then she said:

"I don't think you realise the position of affairs. You may feel justified in keeping silence, but I do not."

Henrietta gasped, and turned quickly towards her sister.

"Do you mean—do you mean that *you* would tell him?"

"Yes."

"You've no right to. I told you in confidence."

"I gave you no promise that I would not speak

of it," said Jessie. "God knows that I am not likely to tell any one unnecessarily, but——"

"But just when it matters—just when it is a question of all my happiness, then you don't care!" cried Henrietta passionately. "You are cruel, unnatural, inhuman! Yes, cruel! cruel!"

"Henrietta, don't!" cried Jessie, sitting up and wringing her hands in equal agitation. "I can't help it! Don't you see that I can't? It would be wrong!"

"Wrong! What does that matter when it would make me good for the rest of my life? Just because of your miserable little conscience my only chance of happiness is to be ruined."

"But, Henrietta, think for a moment! Think of the risk you run? If it were a man one knew——"

"Well, see him then. You can easily know him."

"How can one judge in a single interview?" exclaimed Jessie. "But whatever he is or is not you *must* tell him."

"And if I say I won't?"

"Then I will."

Henrietta turned a little away and gazed out of the window. She was trapped, hopelessly trapped. All her life she had been struggling for liberty, and every effort seemed to entangle her more closely. What was she to do? Would to Heaven she had said nothing to Jessie! This was the second time she had recklessly spoken, and bitterly repented her rashness. One thing was clear, Frank and Jessie must not meet. Whatever happened that must be prevented. Unfortunately, he cared so much about the appearance of the thing. He had counted upon Jessie's support. So, indeed, had she, but at a push she was ready to dispense with the conventions. What *would* he say when she told him that Jessie refused to have anything to do with them? The

thought of giving him an account of her sister's attitude terrified her. Would he put off the marriage? That, of course, was a possibility; but a more pressing anxiety disturbed her now. If only she knew when to expect him! If only he had written to say what time he would be back in Sandgate! Somehow she must manage to get him out of the way before Jessie could see him.

All at once, as she stood there, she saw Frank himself walk up the steps to the front door, and the next instant they heard the bell ring. Jessie, too, had seen him, and the look on Henrietta's face confirmed her guess that this was Mr Smith.

"Is that he?" she asked.

Henrietta could not speak.

"My dear, I will leave you to tell him," said Jessie, getting up. "I will come back before he goes."

She almost ran to the door and went out, in spite of Henrietta, who turned after her with an anguished cry:

"Jessie! Jessie! No! I can't! Come back! Oh, Jessie! Jessie! Jessie!"

CHAPTER XI

As Frank Goulburn asked the maid for Mrs Henderson he saw Jessie's slight figure hastily cross the passage and run up the stairs. He instantly guessed that she knew of their engagement, and that she was retiring out of his way until he should have seen Henrietta, but he felt doubtful whether her flight betokened ill or well for them. In his present frame of mind he was inclined to expect the worst. It occurred to him, however, that it might be easier to win Henrietta to overlook the past than her sister, and probably easier to win her without having to reckon with her sister. Whatever else happened, he wanted to marry Henrietta. Anxious as he was to conduct everything upon a proper footing and with propriety, yet he was ready to sacrifice appearances until the main object should be achieved.

The maid showed him into the little sitting-room and, oppressed by the sense of a coming crisis, he walked in with a discreet tread, and a solemnity of aspect, as if he were entering a church. Henrietta was standing near the centre table with an air of vacillation, which gave him the impression that she had been advancing, and had suddenly drawn back.

"Have you seen your brother? What did he say? How much did you tell him?" she exclaimed precipitately, instinctively trying to defer the moment of peril.

Goulburn was too much occupied with his own difficulties to question her agitation, and had he thought about it at all, it would have seemed to him quite natural that she should be anxious for his views. He held out his hand, and, as she placed hers in it, he drew her towards him with emotion, and kissed her forehead.

His feeling was very real, but his expression of it was intentionally unrestrained. She, on her side, had no leisure of mind to notice the subtleties of his manner. She was thrilled by the grasp of his warm, nervous hand. His tenderness was balm to her; but she was overwhelmed by the desolating belief that only the utterance of one sentence was between her and the loss of his tenderness for ever. She wanted to give way and cry, but she clung bravely to her self-possession until she should know that no escape was left to her.

"Yes," said Frank solemnly. "I have seen my brother, but before I talk to you about *him*, I have a great deal to relate to you."

She gave a short sigh of intense relief. This meant a respite at least, and as long as he was talking, there was no need for her to take the initiative.

"Let us sit down," she said passively, and they each took a chair by the table, she at the end facing the window, and he at the side opposite the fireplace. He noticed half consciously that the fire was blocked with grey ashes, and nearly out, that a red velvet arm-chair was drawn up close to the fender, and that the vases at each end of the mantelpiece were filled with paper hyacinths. Then he turned his look upon Henrietta. She was facing the light, but it was a grey, sunless day, and her fair hair had no glint upon it. There was no animation in her eyes, and except for her black dress, she was as colourless and delicate in outline as a silver-point drawing. As usual her

arms were resting on the table and her hands clasped.

"Henrietta," he began, "the fact that I am telling you this is the strongest proof that I could give you of my love for you. Most men, I suppose, have sowed wild oats in their youth, but most men conceal their past from the women they marry."

He stopped short in consternation. Henrietta's large, prominent eyes were fixed upon him with an expression so strange, so different from anything that he had expected, that he gave up all for lost.

"I see you think that the wildness of youth is unpardonable," he said angrily; "I had better leave you at once," and he pushed back his chair to get up.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Henrietta, putting out her hand to stop him. "How can you say so! Only *do go on.*"

He bent towards her across the table.

"What! You don't? You are ready to overlook what is past? Even a failure, a sordid failure? *That* is what the world cannot forgive."

"Oh, do you only mean that you are poor?" exclaimed Henrietta in a tone of disappointment. "As if I should care for that!"

He pulled his chair forward to the table again.

"Poverty! Yes, but poverty through my own folly, Henrietta, and worldly disgrace. So that I—I do not care—"

He hesitated, flushing a deep red. "So that I do not bear my own name."

"You don't!" she cried. "Then your name is not Smith."

He whirled with excitement. Poverty! disgrace! not his own name! Then—then—then—she stood up, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, or what to say.

"Then what is your name?" she blurted out.

"My name is Francis Goulburn," he said, watching her closely.

The name, however, conveyed nothing to her. She had been little more than a child at the time of his trial, and even if she had heard of it at all, it had made no impression on her. He saw from her face that she knew nothing about him, and he went on eagerly:

"I own now that it was folly, Henrietta, but in those days I thought I could face the world independently, taking a stand upon my own principles. I was daring. I had a spirit of enterprise. I scorned half-measures, and the result was——" He stopped.

"Was what?"

"The result was *prison*, Henrietta!" his voice sank almost to a whisper, and he bowed his head, shading his forehead with his hand.

"*Prison!*" she gasped.

"It was indeed," he groaned.

"But—why—why—What had you done?"

He looked up; his face was almost livid, and his eyebrows twitched together in a nervous frown. He dreaded that he was losing her. He could not tell from her manner what she was thinking; he could not judge what impression further revelations were likely to make.

"What had I done? Do you want to know?" he said. "I wonder if you are what I think you to be, or are you too much a woman to be generous, to understand? I have been called hard names, and most women hearing such names would believe them, and think that all was told."

"But—but what did you do?" she gasped again.

"Do you want to know?" he said bitterly. "Well, I am ready to tell you everything. It was a thing that is done every day, but success excuses all things in the sight of the world. *I failed*. When one

succeeds people shake one by the hand, and are eager to be friends with one; when one fails, one is accused of—of *fraud*, and is sent to jail."

He dared not give her time to speak, and he hurried on fluently:

"You see, I couldn't let you marry me without telling you. I ought to have told you really before I ever asked you to be my wife. But, Henrietta, my love for you swept me off my feet, and now that same love leads me to risk my life's happiness in telling you, even though it all happened many, many years ago. Since then I have grown wiser. I am a changed man. It would be impossible for me to do such a thing again. I see now that it is useless to run one's head against a brick wall. One only bruises one's head, and the wall is not a bit the worse. I have done with that; I am tired of fool-hardiness. I only wish for a tranquil, commonplace life, but which to my mind is no more commonplace really than I am a blackguard really."

He stopped to draw breath, and pulling out his handkerchief he wiped his forehead. Then he stretched out both hands to her across the table.

"Henrietta!" he pleaded.

But in the ferment of her brain Henrietta hardly noticed his gesture and the almost despairing utterance of her name, and she made no response. She was metaphorically gaping before the situation. It was impossible to sort her emotions, to know which predominated. The whole world seemed to have taken a new aspect—an aspect which ought to have shocked her, and yet did not. He had been in prison—he had been a criminal; but the wonderful thing was that she found herself indifferent to the wrongness of his deed. She felt that under any other circumstances she ought to distrust him, but not only did she not distrust him, but she was glad

that she *need* not, for she had no more right to distrust him any more than he had to distrust her. Fraud! Murder! Big, terrifying words, but then, as he said, all was not told in the mere names of a deed. She believed all he said, she understood his attitude, and, with an overwhelming relief, she could now expect that he would understand hers. As she did not move Goulburn drew back, profoundly hurt.

"I knew it," he said sullenly. "I knew you could not forgive disgrace. No woman could. I had better go." And he got up from his chair, but Henrietta sprang to her feet.

"Oh, but I do. At least, I mean—I am so glad. Oh, if you only knew."

He turned sharply towards her, and she almost flung herself into his arms, clinging to him, and hiding her face against his shoulder with a little hysterical laugh.

"I am so glad, you see," she half sobbed, "because it's—it's worse than me."

"*You!*"

"Oh, don't be so surprised!" She clung closer to him. "I was acquitted."

"But great Heavens——"

"That was why she cut me that day on the Leas," explained Henrietta, still hiding her face.

"But—I—I don't understand," he stammered, holding her limply, and completely bewildered by the revulsion of feeling.

Henrietta raised her face. She was no longer colourless. Her eyes were brilliant, tearful, and smiling, her cheeks were pink.

"I don't mind telling you *now*," she said.

"But can you mean——" he began.

"You see, when my husband died they—they said he'd—been poisoned," she said; "but they acquitted me."

"Do you mean to say they accused you of——"

"Don't speak of it!" she said, shuddering; "but they acquitted me."

"Was it long ago?" he asked faintly.

"Oh, I forgot," said Henrietta. "You don't know my name, because of course you must have read about it in the paper. Jessie made me call myself Henderson. I'm really Mrs Harris."

He gazed at her with a blank face.

"Yes, I read about it," he said in a toneless voice. He remembered with a certain flatness of spirit that though he had not actually thought her guilty, he had summed her up rather scornfully as "not much good." But Henrietta! *Henrietta!* How was it possible to associate this woman whom he loved with the heroine of the newspaper reports! She scrutinised him in swift alarm.

"Don't look like that!" she cried sharply. "You don't mind? Oh, don't say you mind. I don't mind about you, and I was acquitted!"

Then all at once he became able to readjust his point of view. He saw clearly that his love for her was the strongest feeling he had, and he perceived that as his past saved the situation for her, so hers saved it for him. For the moment that was all that mattered. He drew her towards him, and kissed her ardently.

"My darling," he explained, "I was only exceedingly surprised."

"That's all right." She gave a little sigh. "Now I don't care what Jessie may say!"

After that they both remained standing opposite each other in silence. Both were uncomfortable in spite of the relief they each of them experienced. Each felt that the blemish in the other was a disillusionment, and both were dissatisfied that salvation should have been procured by such means. Goulburn

was uneasy. It was true he loved her, but the discovery was a shock to his faith in her. Of course, she had been acquitted. The law declared her innocent; he had no reason to think otherwise. Nothing in her manner could justify any doubt. But then he had never guessed that she could be hiding anything from him! If only he had known, he need not have told her about himself. If only she had spoken first! That really was what he regretted. He hated her knowing; it hampered him. Naturally, however, he did not intend to draw back; that would be behaving shabbily, and he emphatically believed himself above any such meanness.

On the other hand, Henrietta was conscience-stricken at her own callousness. It was shocking to mind so little. Any sort of fraud was inexcusable really; it was a base sort of crime, and yet she could not help being indifferent about it. She felt more ashamed of her indifference than of her own crime, and she resolved quickly that she would try not to think about it.

"Let's sit down," she said soberly. "Tell me about your brother, and I will tell you about Jessie too. She made me tell you. I didn't want to. I was afraid; I thought you'd—oh, I thought dreadful things. But it's all right now."

"Yes, it's all right now," he repeated equally soberly.

A sudden idea struck her.

"And oh, your name is not Smith after all!" she cried. "I'm so glad. We will choose a much nicer name than just plain Smith. I always hated being called Harris, you know."

CHAPTER XII

As Jessie fled upstairs she kept her face averted from the front door ; she was aware of the increased light and freshness of air in the passage, and the nearer sound of the sea, which meant that it stood open, but she dared not look to see who was there. She ran into her room, and whirled round to shut the door, but changing her mind she held it ajar, leaning forward across the narrow opening to listen, and steadying herself by pressing one hand against the jamb.

She was out of breath ; her heart was palpitating, and the throb of her pulses seemed to interfere with her hearing. She strained her ears to catch any sound from downstairs, and when she recognised the closing of the sitting-room door she raised herself, shut her own door likewise, and sat down on the edge of the bed, which was the nearest thing to her.

As the commotion produced by her sudden decision and flight subsided, she again began to weep, letting her tears roll down her pale cheeks unchecked. She was profoundly depressed, and she sat there passively crying, and making no effort to think over the situation. It was not until her tears were naturally exhausted that her energies revived. A pang of alarm lest she should not hear them leave the sitting-room made her leap up and again open the door. She did not know what she expected, but she felt it incumbent upon her to be on the alert. She listened

intently to the silence, and presently she was reassured by the distant murmur of their voices. She sat down once more on the bed, and pressed her hands against her hot cheeks.

"O mother, mother!" she moaned inwardly.

If only her mother were there! And yet what good would that do? Indeed, it was far better that she should be spared this last misery!

But her mother's presence would have meant so much to her, herself! She would have then had some one to talk it over with, to share the trouble and perplexity. She would not then have had to depend on her own judgment, to act on her own responsibility.

"But I believe I have been right," she thought, bravely but intently questioning herself.

Surely no one could really say she had been wrong? Nevertheless, her confidence in herself was weakened, and she felt helpless in the face of such a situation.

It was not possible to trust Henrietta; that was what made it so dreadful, so hopeless, so difficult! And it seemed equally impossible to make her ashamed.

But then, on the other hand, Henrietta had accused her of harshness, and with dismay she perceived that the accusation might be true. She had been so much shocked that perhaps she had been unduly stern. And yet, how ought she to have acted? Wrong was wrong; sin was sin; one could not alter facts. Ought she to have pretended that she was not so deeply horrified, in order that she might be more charitable? No, she could not think that; her soul revolted against falsehood of any sort. But then, her rectitude, instead of helping Henrietta, and stimulating her to better ways, had actually driven her to—oh, worse than folly!

Jessie covered her face with her hands, absolutely writhing in her mortification.

"I meant to do right! And I *think* I was right," she assured herself, and she was a little comforted, but only for a moment. Her heart quailed before the knowledge of the present crisis, which her imperative honesty had precipitated. Whatever the outcome of the interview between Henrietta and this man, whether he spurned her or not, the future seemed to Jessie pregnant with misfortune. Every issue from such a pass must be evil.

"Even if he still wants to marry her, I can't believe that he is a good man," she thought vehemently. It was inevitable that Henrietta should be dissatisfied, and Henrietta's dissatisfaction was always so productive. Jessie felt, with a sense of utter weariness, that she could not keep pace with her sister, and during a moment of weakness she wished that she might wash her hands of her, and let her take her chance. Of course, though, that was impossible; it was wrong even to think of it.

She found herself wondering then whether Henrietta would tell him, or simply break off the engagement upon some other pretext.

"In her place that is what I should do," thought Jessie. "I could not have the courage——"

But then Henrietta seemed sometimes so strangely oblivious of the sinfulness of what she had done, and *she actually wanted to marry this strange man.*

"Oh!" groaned Jessie. She minded that almost more than all the rest. It offended her taste, and her bitterest thought was that she might have been partly responsible for it. It seemed to her to prove that Henrietta was hopelessly depraved. Jessie was not given to analysis; she was conscious that although the other was a crime, this indicated a more impassable barrier between her and her sister, but she did not question why.

What was to be done next? What indeed? She

could not help feeling outraged at being implicated in any way with this sort of behaviour, and one reason why all this was so dreadful and unaccountable was that she had never believed before that such things could be done by any but the lower classes and the uneducated.

She wanted counsel and consolation. It occurred to her that clergymen preached prayer to those who required enlightenment, and she knew that her mother found solace in her religion, but somehow she felt baffled at attempting prayer without a formula, and about the affairs of life. Her moral code was purely practical and separate from her religion, which, although revered by her, was mechanical in its detail. She followed both with a certain rigidity of purpose, without questioning her reasons for either.

Certain hard and fast lines between good and evil were as necessary to her moral activity as muscles were to that of her body, but the totally unforeseen distress of applying these hard and fast lines to a case that touched her personally, disturbed her judgment. How could one wholly condemn some one one knew so intimately? One's own sister, in fact? Surely it would be unnatural; and yet her hesitation made her feel morally disordered, bewildered and almost insincere.

Tears of despondency were again filling her eyes when the front door bell rang and diverted her attention. She believed that, of course, it could be no one to see her sister or herself, for none of their friends knew where they were. Nevertheless, she listened idly to the approach of the servant along the passage.

A man's voice enquired if Miss Prout were staying there, and she rose to her feet in an astonishment that amounted to absolute alarm; but before she had

time to formulate her wonder she realised that she must at all costs prevent the visitor's intrusion into the sitting-room, where anything might be happening. She ran downstairs, arriving at the bottom as the maid put out her hand to open the parlour door.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, turning back to speak to a gentleman who was just behind her. "Here is Miss Prout. Some one to see you, miss."

Jessie looked enquiringly at the stranger, and she perceived a short, red-haired man, who bowed to her with grave courtesy.

"Madam," he said, and his voice inspired her with confidence, "I would be grateful if you would grant me the favour of a few minutes private conversation?"

"Oh, certainly," she replied, with equal courtesy of manner, "only——"

He mistook the cause of her hesitation, and hastened to account for his request.

"I should first explain who I am," he said.

"Oh, it's not that," said Jessie, "but you see we are only in lodgings here, and our one sitting-room is engaged at this moment."

"Nevertheless, I have no right to ask for an interview without introducing myself," he insisted. "I believe my brother is engaged to your sister."

"Your brother!" she cried in consternation. "Is he your brother? Yes. He is engaged to her—that is, he *was*—at least—— That's why I can't ask you in. You see *they* are in there. I am so sorry—but——" She raised her eyes to his face full of apology, and she found that he was regarding her with mingled kindness and deference.

Again she felt that she could have confidence in him, and in spite of everything her spirits rose somewhat; she felt less solitary. She armed herself with that manner of composed dignity which she

instinctively assumed in moments when she had to take the initiative.

"Would you mind coming out on the beach?" she suggested. "We shall almost certainly be uninterrupted there. This piece of the shore is so isolated; no one comes down here."

"Madam, I thank you. Whatever you think best will suit me," replied Dick.

He was much concerned to see that she had been crying. Did she know already? It seemed probable. In that case he would be relieved of his task. Frank had behaved more straightly than he had expected. Straightly? Yes, but too late now, confound him! It—it—it was shameful that this little woman should have been made to cry.

Jessie made a movement to go to the front door, but he put out his hand to prevent her.

"Will you not want a bonnet, a cloak or something? You will be cold."

Jessie smiled, and took a tweed cloak from a peg on the umbrella stand.

"This will do. Thank you very much," she said, as he carefully placed it over her shoulders.

If Henrietta's Mr Smith were like this! But of course it was no good thinking of that now. However, her opinion of her sister underwent some change. Perhaps she had been hasty in believing the worst.

Dick opened the door for her to pass out, and, hat in hand, he walked by her side across the narrow road and on to the beach. Their feet crushed noisily into the shingle, and Jessie stood still a little below the top of the slope that descended to the sea.

"Shall we sit down here?" she said.

No one was in sight. All round them was the dappled white and grey of the stones; below them was the restless, sombre, foam-flecked sea, while cloud upon cloud showed sullenly with pale, ragged edges.

The deep brown lines of the breakwaters stretched down to the sea on each side of them. They were out of the wind where they were sitting, but nevertheless it was chilly, and Jessie clutched the edges of her cloak closely together in front. One or two wisps of her dark hair had blown loose on to her forehead; she was looking steadily before her, her pale, narrow face gravely and reservedly expectant.

"Would you mind telling me first of all," said Goulburn gently, "what you meant when you used the past tense in referring to my brother's engagement to your sister? Am I to understand that the engagement is at an end?"

Jessie considered. She was very anxious to keep her presence of mind, to say neither too much nor too little.

"I will explain as far as I can," she said. "I think it is probably at an end, but I don't know it for a fact. You see, my sister told me of the engagement this morning——"

She stopped. How could she speak? How was she to control her voice, her tears? How was she to remain collected, or find words to say what she had to say? She stopped because her mind was empty of everything but a helpless wish that her heart would not beat so fast.

"Yes?" he questioned.

She turned her eyes upon him in a piteous appeal.

"I don't know how to tell you," she said, and her lower lip suddenly gave way as if she were going to cry. He could not bear the sight of her distress.

"Then do not, I implore you—I beg ten thousand pardons for asking—madam, I pray that you——" he cried incoherently, putting out his hand to protest, but Jessie recovered herself with sudden courage and went on.

"It is your right to know what has happened. You see, I have taken a great responsibility upon myself, and now I am afraid. Henrietta, my sister, told me this morning only, and I had no time to think of what was best to do—I didn't even know that they knew each other, or I might perhaps have been able to prevent things going so far. Anyhow, when my sister told me, I—I insisted that she—should give him a—a true account of herself——" Her voice failed.

Goulburn suddenly slid forward, rattling the stones beneath him as if he were going to get up; each hand was spread on the shingle beside him. A gleam of half-incredulous amusement was in his eyes, and his mouth was open in a surprise that bordered perilously upon merriment.

Jessie was startled by the sound of his quick movement. She dared not look at him, but continued quickly:

"I suppose Mr Smith told you her name was Henderson? It's not. And my name is not Prout; it's Pottinger, and she is—Mrs Harris."

For a moment her announcement conveyed no more to Dick than the fact that something made it necessary for them to conceal their real names. He had taken no interest in the trial. He had, of course, heard it talked of, and he had skimmed the newspaper reports of it, but he had already forgotten the names of the people concerned. Jessie glancing at him saw that he was waiting for further information.

"She was tried for murder—of her husband—last month," she said under her breath.

"*Tried! Murder!* Good God!" he exclaimed. "Tried for—Harris! Harris! Yes, I do remember." Then he added abruptly, almost as if asking a question: "She was acquitted?"

"Yes," said Jessie.

There was a silence. Dick turned it over in his mind, watching her acutely.

"I gather, then," he said very slowly, "that—er—she—er——"

Jessie could not speak: she gazed forlornly at the wide, grey horizon and did not attempt to say anything.

Gradually the full meaning of the situation presented itself to Dick Goulburn. He had come post-haste to disillusion an innocent, trusting young woman, and she turned out to be a murderess! And Frank, with his longings for respectability, had chanced on *this* woman of all women! An impulse to give way to unbridled laughter swelled in Dick till he was half-drowned and speechless with the effort to control himself. But he *must* not laugh before he had explained to this harassed, courageous little woman beside him, and yet how in the name of fortune was he to open his lips without laughter. And they were probably looking at each other now, this precious pair! What would he not give to be present? Which would speak first, he wondered? Much would depend on that.

By Jove, yes! And this little woman had had the pain of telling him first. She had acted with heroic uprightness, and here he was wanting to laugh instead of doing his duty and telling her the other side of the story.

"Confound my idiocy and stupidity!" he exclaimed with energy, and Jessie's startled eyes upon him. "Madam, I beg ten thousand pardons—I have taken an unfair advantage of you; unwittingly, it is true, but an unfair advantage all the same, and I beg your pardon."

"But—I don't understand," said Jessie.

"Madam, I have allowed you to distress yourself by giving me information which I ought to have

forestalled by putting you in possession of certain facts concerning my brother."

"Your brother?" she echoed.

"My brother, madam," responded Goulburn. "The reason of my presence here to-day was to see that your sister was left under no misapprehension concerning *him*. Some years ago he stood his trial for certain fraudulent transactions, and served his sentence in prison. *He* was not acquitted. His real name is Francis Goulburn."

• Jessie stared at him in stupefaction.

"I—I don't think I quite understand," she said again.

"My dear young lady, it comes to this: if your sister has been accused of a crime, my brother has been convicted of one. And the fact that they have met in ignorance of each other's performances and have fixed up a matrimonial engagement together is one of the most humorous occurrences it has been my luck to come across for many years."

His eyes twinkled, his lips wavered into a grin, but he would not laugh unless she too could laugh.

Jessie was dumbfounded. She felt that her weary brain was incapable of taking in this new phase.

"Do you really mean that he—that she—that they both——" She could not frame her question.

"It is six to one and half a dozen to the other," he replied concisely.

"But——"

"My dear young lady, if you take my advice you will waste no tears upon them. I think they are probably well able to fend for themselves; and if you could look at the matter from a—an impersonal standpoint, I think you would see that the situation has its humour."

"Then—you think that they—will marry after all?" she asked, still trying to arrange her ideas.

"I think it possible."

"Do you suppose he is telling her now?" said Jessie, suddenly beginning to realise more clearly what was happening. "And—and she is telling him?"

Goulburn suddenly chuckled, and then there was a short silence.

Jessie, grasping her cloak in a thick pucker, was looking down at her lap. Presently a corner of her mouth quivered; she glanced up and met his eye with comprehension, and a smile flashed over her face. It gave him the permission he wanted, and flinging back his head he broke into a prolonged guffaw of irrepressible laughter.

"Oh, don't laugh, please!" said Jessie, half-distressed, but still smiling in spite of herself. "Shall we—don't you think we had better go and see what they are doing?"

CHAPTER XIII

JESSIE paused at the door of the sitting-room.

"I think perhaps I had better knock," she said.

She tapped quickly, but went in without waiting for an answer. Henrietta and Frank rose simultaneously from their chairs at the table.

"O Jessie!" gasped Henrietta emotionally. She ran forward, and throwing her arms round her sister, she hid her face upon Jessie's shoulder, half-laughing and half-crying. "O Jessie! Everything is all right!"

Whatever else Jessie had expected she had not expected this, and she glanced at Dick with an air of protest and deprecation as she unwillingly supported Henrietta's clinging form.

Dick advanced into the room and stood on the hearth-rug, his feet apart, his hands in his trouser pockets, looking from one to the other with undisguised interest.

Frank met his brother's eye sheepishly.

"This is a bit sudden, isn't it? Your coming here, I mean," he said.

"Hardly more sudden than your own movements," replied Dick. "If you hadn't gone off in such a hurry this morning we might have travelled together."

"I *was* in a hurry. I was very anxious to get back here," said Frank, flushing. "I never thought *you* meant to come too."

His tone, in spite of his effort to make it off-hand, was aggrieved, and, indeed, he felt aggrieved. Of

course everything was, as Henrietta said, all right; nevertheless, he could not get rid of the feeling that he had been *done*, and it weighed heavily upon his spirits. Also he was inclined to resent Dick's pursuit of him as insulting. It was as good as telling him outright that he was not to be trusted. Good Heavens! as if he were likely to shirk in a case like this! But then Dick had no subtlety of perception.

However, as it happened, it was just as well Dick had turned up at this juncture. No doubt Jessie had told him, and Frank realised with relief how unpleasant any such explanation would have been. He suspected unwillingly that the situation was ludicrous, and he was morbidly afraid of being laughed at.

"I suppose," he asked tentatively, "you know all about it?"

Dick nodded.

Henrietta felt a thrill of alarm as she heard Frank's question. She clutched Jessie tighter, and without looking up she whispered: "You told him?" but she dared not ask *how much* had been told.

"Yes," said Jessie simply. "Mr Goulburn has been here for the last half-hour, and"—she glanced at Frank—"he has told me——"

"Yes, yes! I know; but it's all right," Henrietta hastily interrupted. "My dear! My dear! Only think! If you knew the—the relief——"

Jessie's look wandered wearily round the room.

"O Henrietta," she said reproachfully, "you have let the fire out."

Henrietta looked up and laughed. Her face was flushed with excitement, her fair hair was ruffled. She put up both hands to smooth it away from her forehead and behind her ears.

"O Jessie! Jessie! How like you!" She laughed a little hysterically. "But I'm very sorry. I am indeed. So it is; quite out."

She crossed to the fireplace and rang the bell. Then she held out her hand to Dick, smiling shyly.

"And you are Mr Dick Goulburn, aren't you? Not Smith, of course." She laughed gently. "Oh, you can't think how glad I am Frank's name is not Smith. It's such a dull name, isn't it? So unsuggestive. Would you believe it, he doesn't want to alter it, but I think we must, you know. After all, it hardly ever happens that one can really choose the name one would like to have."

"It is certainly an opportunity not to be missed," said Dick ironically; he was shocked, but grimly amused.

"Do sit down," said Henrietta, sinking into the armchair and leaning back.

Jessie, weakened by the cold from which she had hardly recovered, had already seated herself on an upright chair near the door, and she remained there, motionless and silent, her hands resting on her lap, looking on with the aloofness of fatigue. The two men, however, remained standing.

"You see," said Henrietta, "a good name is a sort of introduction in itself. Come in," she called out in reply to a knock at the door, adding as the servant entered: "O Kate, will you bring some sticks and light the fire? It's gone out." She waited till the girl had gone again, and then continued: "If one's name is Smith or Jones, people naturally ask who this particular Smith or Jones may be, but Frank says that if one took a less common name people would be sure to ask at once if one belonged to this or that family."

Frank strolled a step or two forward, stroking the back of his head with one hand, and jingling the money in his pocket with the other.

"One must think of these things, you know," he said.

He was recovering his equilibrium. Henrietta's ease of manner and her calm assumption that the situation was quite ordinary not only gave him confidence in her, but it actually increased his self-assurance.

"I tell him I shouldn't mind Smythe quite so much," said Henrietta with a little nod.

"Smythe or Smith," said Frank, "I don't see much to choose between them."

"O Frank," she protested, "there is all the difference."

"You might prefix another name," suggested Dick. "How would you like that? Such as Lee-Smythe or Cane-Smythe, or something of the sort?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Henrietta, "that's a very good idea. How clever of you to think of it! Lee-Smythe? That might even do, unless——"

She stopped abruptly as the maid entered with newspaper and firewood. Jessie, Frank, and Dick all watched the girl intently as she knelt down in front of the fender and proceeded to pick the half-burned coal out of the grate, clearing away the ashes through the bars with an end of stick. They accepted the interlude caused by her presence.

All three were a little surprised and bewildered to find that they were taking the whole position for granted. Frank was congratulating himself on the ease with which he and Henrietta were carrying the thing off, but Jessie was vaguely irritated at what seemed to her a want of delicacy and right feeling.

Henrietta took the opportunity to scrutinise Dick, who was staring at the process of laying the fire as if it were a matter of the utmost importance. Certainly, he was very ugly; not the least like Frank. She could not have married *him*. But he seemed quite nice and disposed to be friendly, in spite of what Frank had said about his difficult temper. To be sure, it would have been almost brutal to repel her; she had a

mental vision of the pretty, graceful way with which she had accosted him, and it gave her a pleasant consciousness of having risen to the occasion.

The servant struck a match and held it to the crumpled newspaper which she had stuffed into the bottom of the grate. Then, sitting back on her heels, she watched the spreading flame as if defying it not to burn.

Henrietta caught sight of the clock.

"Why, how late it is!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea the morning had gone so fast. You will stay to lunch, won't you?" She looked from Frank to Dick. "Tell Mrs Lewis, Kate," she added to the servant, but Dick interposed:

"Thank you, but I think not. No; we will return later in the afternoon, if we may."

"Oh, but do stay now!" cried Henrietta, disappointed.

"With your permission we will leave you present," persisted Dick. "Your sister looks as if she should rest a little."

"Jessie?" Henrietta turned towards her sister. "Oh, you poor dear!" she exclaimed. "You do look tired. How thoughtless I have been! You know she is only just getting over a very bad cold. She has been quite ill. How stupid of me! Kate, ask Mrs Lewis if she has some nice hot soup for Miss Prout."

"I am all right," said Jessie curtly. "And please do stay," she added earnestly to Dick. She wanted his support; she had faith in him. She dreaded being left alone with her sister, though she herself hardly knew why. So much ought to be stated clearly between them before everything could be considered settled, and Henrietta's evasiveness harassed her with a sensation of helplessness.

"Please stay," she said, and rising she came towards the hearth with an uncertain step. Henrietta hastily

got up from the armchair and pushed it forward for her sister.

"Madam," said Dick, "if you wish it, we will stay with much pleasure."

The maid was told to lay the table for four, and she came and went with a clatter of cutlery and china.

"What a dreary day," said Henrietta to Frank. "It was on just this sort of day that I first met you. Do you remember?"

"Do be careful," murmured Jessie, frowning, and her eye on the servant.

Her manner piqued Henrietta, who opened her mouth to retort, but she changed her mind and they all remained silent until the luncheon was ready and the maid had again left the room. Cold beef and potatoes, bread and butter and cheese, and a basin of hot soup for Jessie was the meal prepared. Frank offered to carve, and they drew up their chairs to the table. As he took the carving-knife and fork into his hand, the pleasant thought occurred to him that before long he would be presiding in his own house.

"You must both come and stay with us," he said, "when we are married, and settled in our new home."

Jessie was repelled. In spite of her belief that only plain speaking could put matters upon a satisfactory basis, this sort of remark seemed to her flippant. It showed a want of proper feeling to refer to their relations as if they were quite ordinary.

Frank laid two daintily thin slices of beef upon a plate, and passed it to Henrietta.

"We mean to be married as soon as a special licence can do it," he went on cheerfully. "Next week, if possible."

"What! So soon!" exclaimed Jessie.

"I must get some clothes," put in Henrietta.

"I don't think there is any reason against it, is there?" he asked, addressing himself directly to

Jessie for the first time. He spoke considerately, and his tone somewhat mollified her.

"I suppose not," she said. "Only——"

"Only what?" asked Henrietta.

"Father and mother—they know nothing yet," said Jessie.

"But can't they be written to?" enquired Frank.

Jessie agreed unwillingly.

"Yes, of course. I meant anyway to write to them to-day."

"I don't see the force of prolonging an engagement at any time," said Frank. "And we know our own minds."

Dick raised his eyebrows and pushed back his chair with an air of indignation.

"I can't understand it!" he exclaimed. "You all talk as if the circumstances were the most usual in the world, and upon my soul, I actually find myself forgetting——"

"Ah," pleaded Henrietta. "Don't say that they aren't usual. Let all *that* be forgotten. It isn't as if there were anything to be explained between us. This is so comfortable and happy, isn't it? Don't spoil it all by talking of what is past. Why remember unhappinesses? Really, I don't see why we should ever speak of it again. We only want to be accepted as ordinary human beings. We only want to lead a perfectly normal life."

She had borrowed the word "normal" from Frank. "Respectable," which was the only alternative that occurred to her, was commonplace; besides, it implied censure of the past.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Dick. "But——"

Frank interrupted him.

"She is quite right," he said. "The past is done with; we personally are no longer the same, and it is perfectly fair to claim fellowship with people on our present merits. They can see and talk to us; they

can judge us by our tastes and actions. That is enough, and no one has any right to pry into matters that have no bearing on our characters as they now are."

"But," objected Henrietta, "I don't think I *have* changed, and I am not sure that I want to!"

Dick and Jessie looked at her with wide-open eyes.

"At least not more than just being happy instead of unhappy," she said. "That naturally makes some difference."

She smiled at Frank, who smiled back with a satisfied air.

"Socially," he said, "we have been put in the corner with our faces to the wall, and we mean now to take a back-hander at Society. Mind you, deny the justice of such judgments. If you come to think of it, it will be awfully funny if they welcome us as I mean them to welcome us." He laughed with much amusement.

"I don't think that's the side that strikes me as the most humorous," remarked Dick dryly. "Er—don't you anticipate some little difficulty?"

"Certainly there may be difficulties, but none that are insuperable." Frank leant forward eagerly. "Look here, I'm not a fool, Dick!"

"No," agreed Dick. "No; certainly not."

"Well, I've owned up that I have hitherto misdirected my wits and energies. Now, I mean to direct them to this end, and I mean to carry it through."

"Oh!" exclaimed Henrietta, as if struck by a sudden idea.

They all looked at her enquiringly.

"I've got it!" she cried. "Gore-Smythe! What do you think of that? It's much more uncommon than Lee. Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe."

CHAPTER XIV

STOTBURNE Church stood at the edge of the village where the ground sloped down to low-lying meadowland, a wide green surface only broken by the curves of the narrow river ; in winter these meadows were completely under water. Beyond them rose a line of bare, rounded downs. The village of thatched white-washed cottages was built on a ledge at the foot of another range of hills, and consisted of two lanes at right angles to each other. To the north this ledge between the water-meadows and the downs grew wider and wider, the ranges of hills diverging to the east and west, and the valley became spacious enough for larger villages, interspersed with acres of cultivated land, pasture and wood.

To the south a narrow lane of some two miles in length, dipping and rising as it passed along the base of the slopes and ending in a short, steep ascent, led to the next village, Albury, which straggled up the spur of one of the hills.

On the third Sunday in September in the year 1879 the congregation in the little grey, sombre church were stirred with interest to see amongst them the new tenants of Croft House. The men did not get much beyond the mental observation that there they were. Oh, aye! that was them sure enough. A few of the more enterprising went on to speculate that there would be a possible job

to be had in one way or another up at Croft House, to say nothing of a sale for a bit of garden stuff till they had got the place up there ship-shape; not that there was so much to be had anywhere this year, pretty nigh everything having rotted with the wet.

The women were all more concerned with the lady's appearance. A beautiful dark blue silk gown and small hat trimmed to match, and an elegant fawn coloured cloak! Part of the wedding clothes, for certain, for they were saying she was a bride, and that this was her first married home. Some did say, too, that she had been a widow, but then some folks will say anything, and it hardly seemed a likely tale, considering her age. Anyway, Dr Willoughby had been seen to call at Croft House on Friday evening, and Mrs Hoare, who had sold some eggs to the new cook, had it from her that, God willing, they would be three in family before next spring was in.

Every one stared openly or covertly. The villagers and the servants from the Hall and the Vicarage scrutinised them openly; Mrs Marriot, the wife of the Squire, and Mrs Conybeare, the Vicar's wife, with her two half-grown daughters and their governess, eyed them covertly from their pews on the other side of the aisle, while Mr and Mrs Bruce, the so-called "gentleman" farmer and his wife, who sat immediately in front of the new neighbours, were occupied throughout the service in reproving their three small, restless children, who insisted upon turning round to gaze at the strange lady and gentleman.

Mrs Conybeare was reassured to see that they attended divine service. In these days one heard so much about the laxity and indifference in the towns, and the spread of free thought, that one might

well dread the arrival of undesirable parishioners. And in a little village of this sort it mattered so much that the gentry should set a good example.

The Vicar's wife was a woman of middle height, with a flat figure, and eager, worn, sallow face. Her forehead, which looked dry and shiny, was crossed by fine lines, and her nose was long and thin. She wore a tweed ulster and a black bonnet trimmed rather high in front, which was apt to slip a little on one side.

Yes, she decided they looked nice people; distinctly an acquisition to the neighbourhood. Mrs Gore-Smythe was pretty, and she was well dressed—quietly dressed, with no superabundance of trimming; a great improvement on the late tenants, certainly. Mrs Conybeare noticed with wistful pleasure that they listened to the Vicar's sermon, which as usual was far over the heads of the rest of the congregation, and she sighed as she sighed every Sunday that a man of his intellect should be wasted in this little out-of-the-way parish. She gazed with anxious admiration at the tall, stooping clergyman in the pulpit, who was reading his sermon in a thin, slightly drawling, unimpressive voice. He was shortsighted and wore very strong spectacles; his features were gaunt and refined, his beard sparse and grizzled. Every now and then as he read he raised his eyes and glanced towards the end of the church with a look as vaguely impersonal as his voice.

Mrs Conybeare herself was only giving him a divided attention. Her care for his happiness was a constant preoccupation. Perhaps this Mr Gore-Smythe would prove an intellectual companion for him. Hitherto there had been no one, absolutely no one, within easy reach of whom he could make a friend except the Squire, and he, of course. . . .

By the by, Mr Marriot was not in church. That was sure to mean an attack of gout.

"Dear, dear! Poor Mrs Marriot!" thought Mrs Conybeare as her eyes rested with sympathy on the plump shoulders of the Squire's wife in front of her. She suspected, but without resentment, that Mrs Marriot was dozing.

Mrs Marriot had been a beauty, and in spite of her stoutness she was still comely. Her hair was almost white, and she wore it turned up from her forehead in a high roll. Her broad, smiling face was fresh-coloured. Her skin was very fine, and the wrinkles at the corners of her hazel eyes suggested laughter, even when her pretty, delicate lips were in repose.

She, too, approved of the appearance of the new tenants, and she took note of them with a view to describing them to Gregory when she should get home. It would be a great thing to have nice people in Croft House. The Stephensons had been so impossible.

In a day or two she would call on these Gore-Smythes, and later on they might come and dine at the Hall. It was to be hoped that they played whist, as they were such near neighbours. However, not even interest in the newcomers could keep her quite awake through the sermon. There was something in the dear Vicar's voice which had much too soothing an effect.

Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe were both conscious of the interest they aroused. It caused Frank a passing moment of discomfort as they entered the church, but the air of decorum that he instinctively assumed filled him with decorous feelings which in themselves were a pleasurable sensation. He had forgotten the past, or rather he had forgotten the details of the past, and it lay behind him as a shadowy period of rather aimless fooling, contrasting with the circum-

stances in which he now found himself. For the first time he was taking himself and life seriously, and he now perceived that this was the frame of mind really natural to him. This was the sort of existence that suited him; it was orderly and well-defined, and his conception of his position gratified him. It gave him a sense of comfort and security not unlike the effect of sitting in an armchair and stretching out one's legs by the fireside after riding an uncertain-tempered horse over rough country.

Henrietta was more really excited than her husband. Her first instinct, like his, was to appear unconscious of observation, and this was made possible to her by the knowledge that she was well and suitably dressed. As she walked up the aisle it occurred to her to wonder what these people would say if they knew all about her. If they were interested in her now, would they not be a thousand times more interested then?

It gave her a feeling of self-respect to know that she was different from most other people, that she had been through a great deal, that she had had a "past." She glanced furtively at Mrs Marriot and Mrs Conybeare, and though she was intensely anxious to be liked by them, she felt herself to be altogether on another plane.

However, when the service began, and she knelt down with the rest to call herself a miserable sinner, her heart sank with a sudden disturbing dread that possibly it was true.

The dreadful doubt that still assailed her from time to time absorbed her thoughts and rendered her incapable of following the Confession. Was it possible that she was wicked? She trembled at the thought of a future life and possible judgment. She was as frightened as a child in the dark, and with the same sort of fear. But surely one could not really *be* wicked unless one *felt* wicked, and she felt quite

ordinary. And then it was only one wrong action! One single one in a lifetime, for she was determined that all the rest of her life should be beyond reproach. If only she could get rid of the sense that the blemish in herself was permanent. She glanced at Frank and wondered if he felt the same. He looked perfectly collected and correct, and she took courage from his demeanour. No doubt, if one only knew it, other people had done things just as bad, and what was the meaning of religion if not the forgiveness of sins to repentant sinners. This thought made her feel good, for, of course, what she had been suffering was repentance.

Her trouble passed. The little dreary grey church and the familiar service gave her a pleasant sensation of being at home. The choir was sufficiently well-trained, and the chants and hymn tunes sung in unison soothed her into a pleasantly unreasoning quiescence. She liked the act of kneeling and standing; it made her feel devout, and made her believe that she believed.

The service ended, and the village people went out through the porch, shuffling past each other and in the open falling into a heavy, slouching tread.

It was a fine day at last, a day of pale mist and sunshine. A few tall elms bordering the lane were vividly yellow, and their bright leaves were falling slowly through the still air and settling in the grey, chalky mud and on the green banks.

Below the churchyard, the flood covered the meadows, blue and sparkling, and the further range of downs were the colour of dust, and as ethereal as if a condensation of the sunlit haze.

As Henrietta and Frank came out of the dim light of the church, she paused, and detained him, placing her hand on his arm.

"O Frank!" she said. "How lovely!"

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" he said, looking about him appreciatively.

They walked out into the lane, her hand on his arm, while with the other she held her blue silk gown out of the mud. As they passed some of the village people the men touched their hats and the women bobbed. Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe smiled and wished them good-day.

"Dear, I am so happy," murmured Henrietta.

"It does indeed promise to be all we hoped for," he replied.

In the porch Mrs Marriot and Mrs Conybeare were talking together.

"I am *so* sorry Mr Marriot is laid up," the Vicar's wife was saying, "very sorry indeed. As soon as I saw that he was not in church, I said to myself, that means an attack of gout."

"*So* tiresome, isn't it?" said Mrs Marriot, in her full, genial voice. "I really believe it's nothing but worry about the harvest. And the vexing thing is, that he was going out shooting to-morrow with Mr Bennett. By the way, couldn't you and Mr Conybeare come up and dine to-morrow evening and play a rubber? Do!"

"Oh, dear Mrs Marriot, thank you very much; we shall be delighted," replied Mrs Conybeare, adding, with a look of keen enquiry: "What do you think of our new neighbours?"

Mrs Marriot nodded and beamed.

"Very nice indeed, *I* thought. *Such* a comfort it will be to have well-bred people at Croft House. Of course, Mrs Stephenson *may* have been clever and all that, and I daresay there was no real harm in her, but one can't make a friend of a woman who goes out of her way to be conspicuous."

"She caused a lot of gossip in the village," said Mrs Conybeare sharply. "Last time I went to see

Mrs Hoare she told me that every one was talking about the way she played lawn tennis all Sunday afternoon. Such a hoydenish game, too, for a woman of her age."

"Yes, I *know*," agreed Mrs Marriot, momentarily checking her smile to look shocked. "But speaking of Mrs Hoare reminds me of something I want to talk to you about. Do you know if it is a fact that there is likely to be a nursery at Croft House?"

"Well, I don't know, but Dr Willoughby drove over on Friday and called there," replied the Vicar's wife. "I saw his trap waiting for him."

"Well, but do you know such a splendid idea has occurred to me," cried Mrs Marriot with a mellow laugh. "I suddenly thought what a nice place it would be for Mary Hoare if they would take her as nursery maid; under an experienced nurse, of course. It would be a great thing to keep her in the village near her mother, and especially if she can be with people who are particular, you know."

CHAPTER XV

THE next day the Vicar and his wife went to call on Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe.

Croft House stood on a slight rise of the ground, a little way to the north of the village. The lane passing it was sunk between high banks, and the wall enclosing the house and garden was several feet above the level of the road. A flight of steps led up to a doorway in this wall, over which were placed three stone balls stained with yellow lichen. Patches of lichen also showed on the wall, and creeping weeds, moss, ferns, and clumps of wall-flowers grew in the crevices. Inside, a flagged path led across the garden from the gate to the front door. The house itself was built of the same grey stone, with mullioned windows and a protruding porch.

Mr and Mrs Conybeare were shown into a half-furnished room to the right of the entrance, and were left there to wait, while the maid went to fetch Mrs Gore-Smythe. Pictures were stacked with their faces against the panelled wall; a heap of pink-flowered chintz lay on an armchair; two other chairs, the one upside down upon the other, were still tied together; a packing case stood in the centre of the floor.

Mr Conybeare looked round him with interest.

"Ah," he said, in his thin, drawling voice. "I admire this room. I always have admired it."

"I suppose they mean to make it the drawing-room," remarked his wife.

Mr Conybeare took out a second pair of spectacles and with deliberation put them on his nose without removing those he already wore, and he gazed up at the cornice of plaster-moulding of fruits and leaves.

"I wish we had anything like that at the Vicarage," he said. "I don't believe there's a finer specimen of that sort of work in the county."

At this moment the door opened and Henrietta came in, blushing and smiling.

"I am so sorry to have kept you waiting all this time," she said as she shook hands, turning from one to the other. "I was unpacking books in the library, and I was so dusty I had to go and wash."

"I fear we are disturbing you," began Mrs Conybeare.

"Oh no, indeed," cried Henrietta. "I'm so glad you have come, if you will excuse rather a muddle. Won't you come up to the library? It's the only room we have got into anything like order." She led the way into the hall and up the stairs, chattering all the time. "You see, I wanted to have a room ready for my husband to work in as soon as possible. He's writing a book, you know. Something deep and philosophical that I can't understand. We *had* to choose an upstairs room for his study, unless we used the hall as a dining-room, and we thought that might be inconvenient. Besides, an upstairs room has advantages; it's further away from possible interruptions, and has a lovely view of the downs."

She brought them to the end of the passage, and opened the door of a room where they found Mr Gore-Smythe arranging volumes along the shelves of a large book-case. A Chesterfield sofa stood out from the wall at right angles to the fireplace, where

a fire was burning brightly ; comfortable armchairs were arranged facing the hearth, and near the window stood a massive writing-table, with drawers and pigeon-holes, and already furnished with pens and ink, and a handsome leather-backed blotter.

Mr Gore-Smythe shook hands, and they seated themselves, Mrs Conybeare in a corner of the sofa and Henrietta beside her ; the Vicar, pulling his coat-tails out of the way, dropped with a certain air of dislocation into an armchair, and Frank settled himself in the other.

"I told her to bring tea here," said Henrietta. "Ah, here it is."

"I hope you are not disappointed in Stotburne, Mrs Gore-Smythe, now that you have seen the sun rise and set here?" remarked the Vicar.

Henrietta laughed.

"Oh no, indeed ; are we, Frank?" She appealed to her husband, who turned to the Vicar, saying :

"No ; we are really delighted with the place. It is just what we hoped to find."

"Why, the place is a delightful place," said the Vicar in his whimsical, high-pitched voice. "It's a restful place. The scenery is pretty and the people stupid. What more can one want?"

"O Thomas!" hastily interposed Mrs Conybeare. "You mustn't take my husband literally, Mr Gore-Smythe. I'm sure it would be a God-send to him to have some one to discuss things with."

"My wife believes in me, you see," said the Vicar. "And during the twenty years that I have lived here, she has always told me that my intellect is unequalled in the neighbourhood. It alarms me when I hear you are a man of learning. I shoul' miss it very much if she left off."

Frank and Henrietta both laughed.

"You are writing a philosophical work, are you

not?" enquired Mr Conybeare, turning his mild blue eyes upon Frank.

Frank leant back in his chair, crossed his legs and pressed his finger-tips together. He was expanding hourly in the freedom of believing in himself and of being believed in. He was delivered from the discomfort of explaining himself, of having to make out a case for himself; he was delivered from the hampering sensation of being criticised.

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully. "I'm writing on a subject that has interested me for many years. A sort of philosophical treatise on the development of social interdependence, showing how the whole scheme of moral conduct—moral, you understand, in its wider sense—is not, as one is apt to think in youth, a convention, and arbitrary, but is really based on essential truths. Truths, however, which are beyond the comprehension of the multitude, but of which the effects are recognised even in the most elementary by instinct."

The Vicar stroked his scanty grey beard.

"Ah," he said, "the instinct of the policeman. Yes, every one is a policeman at heart. That's one reason why I like my profession. It gratifies that instinct to a quite exceptional degree."

"O Thomas!" protested Mrs Conybeare, pausing as she sipped her tea. Henrietta laughed, and with a smile offered him a cup, while Frank sprang to his feet to hand bread-and-butter and cake to both their guests.

"You know he always will talk in this absurd way," said Mrs Conybeare to Henrietta. "I'm sure he has quite shocked the Squire. The Squire, you know, thinks that he means all he says."

"Oh, the Squire is a delightful old man who says 'apricock' and 'yaller' and 'dimond,'" said Mr Conybeare gently. "But he's not quite sure whether

I am orthodox or not, and he won't take my word for it, so he's given up listening to what I say. He never *did* listen to my sermons."

Frank seated himself again, and said to the Vicar as he stirred his tea :

"I want to trace the development of society historically from the most primitive stages. In the Middle Ages the evidences are most curious and interesting. Social inter-responsibility was then absolutely the only basis of order——"

Henrietta turned to Mrs Conybeare.

"I always wish I could understand these questions of tendencies and morals," she said. "I'm afraid I'm very ignorant. You see, I always lived in the very depths of the country. I wonder whether they really will change the education of women. Wouldn't it be strange if girls were sent to college as a matter of course, as boys are?"

"My dear Mrs Gore-Smythe, believe me," said Mrs Conybeare with emphasis, "this idea of the education of women is a great mistake."

"Do you really think so?" said Henrietta eagerly. "I'm inclined to think so too," she added with a little nod. "It seems to me that a woman is really educated by her emotions. It doesn't matter how much you know, if you have never felt anything deeply, or cared much for any one. That phrase 'the school of life' means so much, doesn't it?" She sighed.

"I fail to see what women would gain," said Mrs Conybeare firmly. "A woman's sphere is her home. I ask you, how are you going to teach a woman to look after her home by sending her away from it? All this talk about woman being equal to man and requiring the same education is absurd, and I think wrong. I'm sure there's talk enough nowadays about division of labour, and yet people won't recognise the most obvious form of it. I for one

should never think of sending my girls from home to be educated."

"Yes," said Henrietta softly ; "after all, a mother is the natural guide of her children, especially of her daughters."

How she hoped her little child would be a daughter. She met Mrs Conybeare's swift, penetrating glance, and her own shy, smiling eyes told her secret. She was conscious of the poetry of young motherhood, of its far-reaching pathos. She thrilled to a sense of the inevitable, of an experience she herself could not escape, of an unknown future that awaited her child.

All Mrs Conybeare's feminine sympathies were stirred. Such a nice, pretty young thing, and of course in her situation she was feeling her responsibilities. Mrs Conybeare was anxious to be of use to the young wife. Naturally, she would be glad of moral support, of sympathy and advice, especially from an older woman. With an impulse to effusiveness she placed her hand upon Henrietta's.

"My dear, you will come and see me, won't you?" she said. "As soon as you can spare the time, come and have tea. We are such near neighbours ; I hope we shall see a great deal of one another."

"Thank you, thank you so much. I will come as soon as I can," said Henrietta fervently. She looked as though she was going to say more, but she checked herself, and in the pause she heard Frank say to the Vicar :

"I didn't always hold these views, however. As a young man my reasonings led me to very revolutionary ideas."

"Ah, to be sure," said Mr Conybeare. "I have sometimes thought that in order to think right, it is necessary to think wrong first."

As Mr and Mrs Conybeare started to walk back to the Vicarage she said with decision :

"Very nice people indeed, Thomas. We are fortunate to have them as neighbours. I liked her extremely. She is pretty, too; don't you think so? And I thought he seemed agreeable, and evidently he is a learned man. What did you think of him? Did you like him?"

"Did I like him?" replied the Vicar. "Oh, I like any one who is clean and speaks good English."

CHAPTER XVI

As soon as the Gore-Smythes were settled in their new home Henrietta wrote to invite her father and mother and sister to stay with them. However, Mrs Prout, as she was now called, replied that as Henrietta's father was ill with a slight touch of bronchitis, she thought it wiser not to venture to leave home until the spring. Mrs Prout wrote stiffly, and Henrietta was vexed and disappointed. To complete her happiness she needed the approbation of those few people who, knowing both the past and the present, were biassed against her husband and herself. As long as any one doubted her, she could not rest quite untroubled in her self-assurance. Otherwise it would be so easy to forget all that had happened.

However, she would convince them in the end. She would show what her character really was in happier circumstances, and how vast a difference could be made by love and sympathy. They should see that it was not innate vice, but the struggling of a thwarted nature that had driven her to desperate deeds. She now wanted to "show off" her virtuous life and well-regulated household to them all: to her father and mother, to Jessie and Dick Goulburn, but especially to Jessie. Jessie knew more than any one, except perhaps Dick Goulburn, and Henrietta felt that he, if he did know everything, was more likely to be lenient to her. She had seen his eyes twinkle

with amusement at unexpected moments. Of course, it was possible he was laughing *at* her, but even so, she had a certain confidence that his humour was indulgent. Besides, he had given them a cheque for two hundred pounds towards their furnishing expenses.

Henrietta thought that Mr and Mrs Prout had not been told the details of her engagement. They had come to Sandgate in answer to a letter from Jessie, and they had attended the ceremony at the registrar's office with grim faces, but they had said nothing to her to show that they were informed of all the circumstances. Since her marriage she had corresponded regularly with her mother and Jessie, writing long, cheerful, chatty accounts, first of her honeymoon in Paris, then of their house-hunting and purchase of furniture, and lastly, of her tranquil daily life at Stotburne.

Mrs Prout replied as regularly, with a brief note, occasionally developing into a little homily if a theme presented itself, which was the only sign she ever gave of a yielding to tenderness towards her daughter. Jessie was much more communicative on the whole, but her letters were also much more uncertain in tone. At times she seemed to be wayed by an impulse of affectionate sentiment, and would write with a friendliness which filled Henrietta with satisfaction. Then, apparently, she would repent her weakness, and her next letter would be even more chill and forbidding than her mother's.

Henrietta disbelieved in the bronchitis, and she immediately wrote to urge Jessie to come by herself, but the illness was a fact, and having in the meantime become serious, Jessie too was kept at home to help nurse her father.

That winter was exceptionally cold. Heavy snow fell, and the glaring level white of hills and valleys, marked only here and there by the dark lines of

trees and hedgerows, transformed the whole country with a strange aspect of unreality. Henrietta did not repeat her invitation until the rigorous weather had changed, and the spring had begun. Then she wrote to Jessie again, this time with added reason for urging her to come, and one afternoon early in March, Frank drove to Albury station to meet his sister-in-law.

It was nearly a year since they had met, and Jessie's first impression as he bent down out of the dog-cart to shake hands with her was that he no longer quite corresponded to her memory of him.

"Very glad to see you, Jessie. How are you?"

"How do you do?" said Jessie, a little restrained, but smiling politely, and she turned away to see if the porter were bringing her luggage. He was just behind her, and she climbed up to the seat beside Frank, while her box was hoisted up into the back of the cart. She leant forward over the wheel to give the man some pence.

"All right?" enquired Frank.

"Thank you, miss. Right, sir," said the porter, and with a light flourish of the whip over the horse's neck they drove out of the station yard into the lane.

The air was keen, and Jessie held her tweed cloak closely round her, and bent her head a little forward as they faced the breeze. The cold and the sunshine made her screw up her eyelids, and her cheeks and nose were stung to a delicate pink.

"How is Henrietta?" she asked.

"Very well," he said; "yes, very well indeed. She is looking forward to having you. I hope Mr Prout is really better."

"Yes, thanks," said Jessie, wondering how to define the change in him; "but it has been an anxious time."

"Ah, we feared so," he replied.

Yes, he was different. Was it only because they met under other circumstances, or was the change more essential? Somehow he had become of greater consequence, his manner was assured, and the touch of embarrassed swagger which she remembered had completely vanished. She realised suddenly that she had come instinctively prepared to patronise both Frank and Henrietta, and in the same moment she perceived with discomfort that face to face with him she was as tongue-tied as a shy school-girl. She wished dolefully that he had not come himself to meet her.

"It is very pretty here," she said, for the sake of saying something.

"Beautiful country, isn't it?" he replied. "We like it very much, and the people about here are pleasant, which is a great thing."

Jessie became frigid. She recollected that their intercourse with their neighbours was based upon a deception, and her sense of superiority returned.

"I suppose," she said stiffly, "you have got to know several people by now."

"Oh, of course," he said. "Naturally, every one within a reasonable distance has called."

"Indeed!" said Jessie.

"But what matters far more, is that we are particularly fortunate in our nearest neighbours," he went on with some emphasis. "Mr and Mrs Marriot are exceedingly nice. He's a fine specimen of the old-fashioned country squire. Very old family, you know, keeping up the traditions of a past generation. We often go in there to dine and play a rubber. He's taken a great fancy to Henrietta, and she goes up to the Hall to play backgammon with him."

Jessie said nothing, but pinched her lips together.

Mr Gore-Smythe understood her attitude and

resented it. He was not at all sure that he approved of Henrietta's wish to keep up with her relations. It was natural, perhaps, and under the circumstances it was best to let her have her way, but he could not help feeling that it was unwise. So far everything had gone without a hitch; it would be a thousand pities to admit any disturbing element.

Henrietta was all that he could wish; gentle, pretty, light-hearted and popular, and an admirable housewife. The only drawback was that shadow on her past. Naturally, he deplored *that*, in every way. It was so recent too, that the danger of discovery was a very real one. Fortunately, it would hardly be possible to find any one whose manner was more completely indicative of innocence. To suspect her of any undesirability would appear to every one who met her now an absurdity.

Then he found himself wondering, cautiously, almost as if he feared that his thoughts might be detected, whether she had really done "the thing" she had been accused of. In the depths of his being he suspected her, but he felt that any such suspicion was simply unallowable; it was worse than rash. Good Heavens! *This* was what came of meeting Jessie again. Why, it was weeks since he had given a thought to the past, and to think of it at all was a mistake, and even demoralising. Of that he was quite sure.

Of course, Jessie's narrow-mindedness condemned them both as hypocrites, which was ridiculous. His convictions were absolutely genuine, and the very thing which most went to prove his sincerity was the way in which he forgot the past.

To be sure, he was conscious of a certain humour in the fact that all these good people were duped into recognising them socially, for he had no confidence that any one of them would continue to hold out the

hand of friendship if they knew the real state of the case.

And Jessie had no sense of humour, so that not even here could they come to an understanding!

They were driving between budding hedges along the narrow lane that led to Stotburne. On one side, beyond sloping fields, lay the water-meadows, now a smooth, vivid green; on the other rose the sombre, rounded shapes of the downs. The pale sun was already sinking towards the hills, and the air had a curious appearance of thinness which seemed to leave the world around them too much exposed, and visibly chill.

Jessie longed to arrive. The silence was embarrassing; she was cold and tired. Feeling the need of making conversation, she exerted herself again.

"How is your brother?" she enquired. "Have you heard from Mr Goulburn lately?"

She had quite forgotten that Dick Goulburn and Frank Gore-Smythe were, from the moment of the marriage, merely "old friends," and that all relationship between them was to be ignored.

Frank's whole face flushed crimson, and he glanced at her with a look of ferocity that startled her into a scared perception of her mistake.

"I—I beg your pardon," she stammered, colouring in her turn; "I—I quite forgot."

"There are some things that no one has any right to forget," he said grimly, but Jessie did not repeat her apology. She considered his severity misplaced.

However, Frank's smouldering indignation had in that moment acquired force and form. They still had some three-quarters of a mile to drive; there was time to "have it out" with her, and by George he meant to "have it out!"

"There are one or two things I wish to call your attention to," he remarked, in a perfectly cool and

deliberate voice, and Jessie civilly prepared to listen to him. "I regret extremely having to speak to you about such matters. I had hoped that you had sufficient delicacy of feeling to obviate the necessity, but you have shown me, only too clearly, that I cannot count upon any such sensibility."

Jessie's first sensation, as she realised that he intended to blame her, was the involuntary physical shrinking of any one who is found fault with, but the next moment her spirit swelled with a sense of outrage, and she set her lips in the determination not to reply a word.

"However, perhaps it is just as well to have a clear understanding to start with," he continued, "and I tell you once for all that I will not allow any one to distress Henrietta, and especially at this present time."

"Why, of course——" began Jessie indignantly, but she stopped short. No, she would not say anything! She would not! She would not! She was very angry, but also she felt a little guilty, for she was conscious that her honesty was apt to be injudicious.

"Don't misunderstand me," said Mr Gore-Smythe. "I am not asking your forbearance. I simply forbid you to annoy my wife."

Jessie gasped, and as he continued to speak she had a bewildered sensation that he was forcing her to turn moral somersaults. That he should take such an attitude towards her was in itself a reversing of what she had every right to expect, and the mere fact that *he* was talking, and *she* listening to him, put her in a sense in his power.

"I am sorry if I appear blunt," he went on, "but your manner has forced me to plain-speaking. And I think it is as well you should know that it is against my judgment that Henrietta has kept up with her family at all. In my opinion, she would

have been quite justified in breaking all connection with those who have shown themselves so singularly lacking in sympathy and comprehension, even in common humane helpfulness. But Henrietta has an unusually affectionate and forgiving nature. It was her earnest wish that you should come, and I could do no other than consent. But while I have the opportunity, I want to ask you by what right do you elect to judge your sister and myself? It is perfectly true that we have both been arraigned by the law of the land; but the law can only deal with actions, and a whole moral world lies beyond the scope of the law. If I chose to defend my past to you, I could do so in such a way that would leave you no argument to offer against it, but, as a matter of fact, I have changed my point of view; changed it in a perfectly honest and legitimate way. I hold other opinions. But, though I now consider that my actions were wrong, I declare that I was not blameworthy, because I was labouring under genuinely mistaken ideas. And I do claim that you, inexperienced as you are, have no right to settle the case off-hand against me! Forgive my saying so, but I cannot think that you appreciate the intricacies of the question. You yourself have never been tempted to dispute conventions, nor would you be capable of doing so, and for this reason you cannot estimate the real force of either side of the matter. And now, under the present circumstances, I ask you to withhold your judgment, and not to act in such a way that you may destroy the usefulness, to say nothing of the happiness, of two, possibly three, lives. It is a reasonable request. I claim that our present life is a good life, and that *no one* has any right to hinder us from living this life to the very full. Here we are," he added abruptly as they stopped at the gate.

"Don't—I will go back by the next train," said Jessie in a stifled voice.

"Nonsense, my dear sister," he said gently. "For one thing you can't, as there is no train till to-morrow. For another, what have I said, but that there are some things of which you are not competent to judge?"

A boy emerged from the stable-yard and came to the horse's head. Frank put down the reins and prepared to get out. As he did so he turned to her again.

"Don't act hastily. Think over what I have said, and I believe that not only will you forgive my plain speaking, but you will agree with me."

He got down and rang the bell.

"This is rather an inconvenient entrance when one is driving," he said, as he came to help her down, "but we are having a gate opened further up the lane, and a drive made right up to the front door."

Jessie, half-dazed, got out of the cart and went up the steps to the garden door. She felt vaguely that she might well refuse even to spend the night under his roof, that she might insist upon being taken to the nearest inn, and she was aware of a certain regret that she did not do so. But almost in spite of herself she crossed the flagged path to the front door, which was standing open, revealing the square, comfortable hall, where a fire was blazing and where Henrietta, fair and smiling, in a flowing blue tea-gown, was waiting to greet her.

The next moment she was in the warmth and comfort, and enfolded in Henrietta's arms, and welcomed with an affection that was as grateful to her troubled spirit as the fire was to her numbed limbs.

CHAPTER XVII

"THINK of it! Nearly a whole year since we have seen each other!" cried Henrietta. "It must never be so long again. Are you very tired, Jessie? You must be frozen, you poor dear. Come in, come in here! Tea is all ready. Let me take your cloak."

She took Jessie into the drawing-room, divested her of her wraps, placed her in an armchair by the fire, and poured her out a cup of tea.

"Ah!" said Frank, standing on the hearth-rug and warming his hands. "There is a true March nip in the air."

The parlourmaid came into the room and asked Miss Prout for the key of her trunk. Frank hovered over the cakes, choosing one with elaborate care, and Jessie hesitated for a second. Then she gave up the key, almost as if she could not help it, and for a little while afterwards she found herself worried by the knowledge that her luggage was actually being unpacked.

A sudden pause had fallen upon them. Their greetings were used up, and the moment had come when no one knew what to say next.

"There is so much I want to hear, and so much I want to tell you, that I really don't know where to begin," said Henrietta, laughing.

"We shall arrive at it by degrees," replied Jessie. "It always takes a little time."

"Ah, yes," said Frank. "Very curious the sort of constraint one feels at meeting after a long interval."

It shows how much in ordinary intercourse is left unsaid. One has to re-establish an understanding before one can resume intimacy."

"Yes, that's just it!" exclaimed Henrietta.

She took her sister's cup and filled it again. Frank offered her some cake.

"How charming this room is!" said Jessie, letting her glance wander round it.

"Isn't it?" cried Henrietta. "Don't you admire our cornice? I am so longing to take you all over the house and show you everything. And to-morrow you will see how beautifully the house is placed. We have a lovely view of the Downs."

Frank put down his empty cup on the tea-tray.

"Darling," he said to his wife, "don't you think you ought to lie down?"

She looked up at him, smiling.

"Very well, dear," she said submissively.

He kissed her forehead and went out of the room.

Henrietta turned to Jessie.

"Now would you like to go upstairs and take your hat off, or shall we stay here for a little?"

Jessie was leaning back in the big cosy armchair, her feet on the fender. The maid had brought in a couple of lamps, which filled the room with a soft light, and the curtains were drawn over the windows. The fire flickered and stirred quietly. She yielded passively to a sense of repose of body and mind. She would move later: she would think later.

"Let us stay here," she said, and Henrietta lay down on the sofa close to Jessie's chair.

As soon as she was settled, she held out her hand to her sister.

"Dear Jessie, I am so glad you have come," she said. "I have been looking forward to seeing you so much, that now you *are* here I can hardly believe it is true."

Jessie pressed her hand.

"Dear Henrietta," she said, and then sighed with perplexity. She never knew how to regulate her relations with her sister. Her inconsistency made her feel untrue, and yet each mood was genuine at the time.

She was aware now that, without thinking about the matter at all, she had decided to remain at Stotburne in spite of Frank.

"I've never known what happiness is before," said Henrietta. "And do you know, I'm sure it is very good for one to be happy. It expands one's nature, and it makes one more intelligent. It does really." She gave a little laugh. "Of course, daily intercourse with a man like Frank must improve one. And then, you see, it is not only my marriage that has made me so happy, but every one about here has been so nice to us."

And for the next hour and a half she lay on the sofa, her fair head denting the chintz cushions, her blue gown spreading about her in long folds, and described the past winter in contented, desultory talk; how people had driven over to call on her, who they were, what they were like, which of them were agreeable; how she had returned their visits, and what sort of houses they lived in; how she made petticoats for the villagers, and gave them soup when they were ill. She described the Conybeares.

"She's such a nice woman, and does such a lot of good. And I like him also, though he's rather a character. Frank says he is really a clever man, but rather an egoist, which is a limitation. Frank says he has taken up a pose, and can't talk seriously for five minutes for fear of letting himself be natural."

She talked of the Marriots with a slight air of gratification. At Christmas there had been a large house party at the Hall of all the Squire's married

sons and daughters and their children—all but one, who had married beneath him, and of whom they never spoke. And Christmas had been delightful. Fortunately the Hall was so near that even the snow had not prevented them from going there.

Jessie listened and listened. She leant back in her chair, her narrow pale face turned towards her sister. A feeling of hopeless surprise rose and swelled within her; she was oppressed by the sensation that she had lost her bearings. The contrast between things as they were and things as they ought to be staggered her. At the back of her mind she was convinced that her mere presence there was placing the Gore-Smythes under an obligation, but not only had Frank told her that he had consented to her coming against his better judgment, but even Henrietta welcomed her upon equal terms.

Indeed, to hear Henrietta speak of Frank almost with reverence, as if there could be no second opinion about his wisdom and uprightness, was only one degree more astonishing than her apparent freedom from any uncomfortable recollection.

Jessie felt that her own judgment had been wrenched askew, and she was no longer sure of her opinions. Was there no retribution for ill-doing if it was not found out, if deception was added to crime? And yet she perceived the force of what Frank had said to her—that they were leading good lives, and that no one had any right to interfere. Why should their present virtue count for nothing? Why should they be hampered for ever by a wrong they had once done? Above all, why should the little unborn child suffer for their fault?

But then again, why, *why* should Henrietta be so blessed?

The contrast between her life and her sister's was brought home to Jessie as she sat gazing at Mrs

Gore-Smythe, and a faint film of darkness seemed momentarily to rise before her eyes. She realised how dreary her life was in the small country town where the Prouts had taken a house. She had been forced to break with all her friends, to leave her much-loved home, to change her occupations. And her old father and mother, broken by shame, and worn out by illness, had become captious and morose, and disinclined to make new friends.

Jessie pulled herself together abruptly, horrified to perceive that her thought might have an appearance of complaint. She assured herself that she had nothing to complain of. She loved her parents devotedly, and their companionship was enough for her. If she were sad, it was only because *they* were sad.

As she listened to Henrietta's chatter, she asked her a question from time to time, and Henrietta detected no want of sympathy in her manner. She had quickly perceived, however, that Jessie was subdued, and watching her closely she noticed that she had grown thin, and was a little worn.

"Jessie," she said suddenly, "you are not happy."

"I!" cried Jessie. "Not happy? Why do you say that? Of *course* I am quite happy."

Henrietta thought it over. To be sure, Jessie's life must be *dismal*, and there was only one solution possible. She ought to marry. Unfortunately, she was not the sort of woman that men fall in love with easily, but there ought to be the right man somewhere who would appreciate her sober-minded worth! Ah! Brilliant idea! Dick Goulburn! The very man. They would suit each other admirably; even ridiculously well. She would invite him to Stotburne while Jessie was there; not yet, of course. Ah, another idea! He should be the baby's god-father, and Jessie should be the god-mother.

Henrietta could hardly control her glee. She longed to tell Frank her plan.

"No, my dear Jessie," she said after a little pause, "you are not happy. You ought to marry!"

Jessie laughed, but her laughter was a little forced.

"That certainly is not likely," she said. "And in any case you are quite mistaken. I'm a little tired; the winter has been a trying one, but that is all. Please don't get such extravagant ideas into your head."

But even as she spoke she knew that Henrietta was right. She was not happy, but she thought it wrong to be discontented with her lot. She wanted to marry, but she was shocked to admit such a thing even to herself. She wanted a child, and that shocked her too. It was all wrong; but in spite of her scruples marriage appeared a haven from loneliness, gloom and constant self-restraint. She longed to give herself up body and soul to some one wiser and stronger than herself who would take care of her and love her, who should know her innermost thoughts.

A sudden pang interrupted her.

"It is hardly likely that I shall marry," she said acidly, "for of course I should have to say *who* I am and all that has happened."

No sooner had she uttered the words than she realised that they were cruel. The effect on Henrietta was startling. All the light vanished from her face. She did not say a word, but she flushed crimson, and then turned an ashen white.

"Don't be afraid," said Jessie quickly. "It will not happen."

But again her heart protested against her words.

Was her whole life to be restricted for Henrietta's sake? Was it fair, was it reasonable to expect it? But then was it not partly her own rigid honesty that fettered her? *Then*, was there no solution?

All at once the same idea that had occurred to Henrietta occurred to her. Dick Goulburn knew everything. If he—— Her brain seemed to remain motionless before the suggestion; she defined nothing, but she was absorbed in its unexpressed sense.

Perception of the complete silence that had fallen upon Henrietta roused her, and she was scandalised at herself. She seemed almost contaminated by her own thoughts.

She glanced at Henrietta, who remained persistently mute, with downcast eyes, and she felt guilty. She had done the very thing that Frank had foreseen, the very thing he had sternly bidden her to avoid. He had been right in mistrusting her capacity for controlling her tongue. Was he right in the rest? His parting words occurred to her again.

"I have only told you that you are not competent to judge," he had said, and it was true. She was not competent. The problem was too difficult, much too difficult.

She rose, unable to bear the silence any longer.

"Well, I think I will go and take off my hat," she said, trying to speak naturally.

Henrietta slowly turned her eyes upon her sister. Then she too got up from the sofa.

"Yes, it's just time to dress," she said, and they went upstairs together.

Mrs Gore-Smythe led the way to Jessie's room, which was prettily furnished with dark furniture, and pink and white chintz and wall-paper. A fire was burning briskly, the fender and hot water-can gleamed, and all Jessie's things were unpacked and put away.

"Do ask for anything you want," said Henrietta, resuming her hospitable manner. "The housemaid's

name is Bruce. Would you like her to help you dress?"

"Oh no, thanks," said Jessie, adding, with a wish to propitiate: "O Henrietta! How charming you have made it all!"

"Do you like it? I am so glad," said Henrietta with a pleased smile. "Well, I will leave you now. You'll come down to the drawing-room when you're ready, won't you?"

She turned to go, but hesitated. Then she came back and took both her sister's hands.

"Jessie," she said, "you must never speak of—of *that* again. You see, it must be for all of us as if it had never been—especially now. I mean, my child—our child must never know, whatever happens."

CHAPTER XVIII

JESSIE'S speech rankled in Henrietta's heart. That is to say, whenever nothing else was distracting her mind, the recollection of it recurred to her, and even when most eagerly occupied she was haunted by a sense of some undefined unpleasantness. As far as possible she tried not to let her thoughts dwell upon it, and she gave herself up to the enjoyment of Jessie's visit.

There was so much to show her. Henrietta's impulse was to emphasise all signs of her prosperity as if these were an argument in her favour, and every fresh proof that she could give of her domesticity she felt to be a weapon against her sister's unpromising opinions.

The first afternoon after Jessie's arrival Henrietta took her to tea at the Vicarage; the following day Mrs Marriot called, and Mrs Gore-Smythe triumphed in the fact that her sister now saw for herself the affectionate intimacy between her and her two nearest neighbours. As Mrs Marriot took her leave, she invited Jessie and Mr Gore-Smythe to dine at the Hall on the following Tuesday, and Henrietta, who divined that her sister had been prejudiced against any one quoted by Frank or herself, was amused and delighted to hear Jessie accept with evident pleasure. As soon as Mrs Marriot had gone, however, Jessie regretted that she had not made some excuse. The

fact was, that after a winter of unrelieved monotony, even an hour's conversation with a pleasant elderly woman had exhilarated her, and she had impulsively accepted an invitation which in itself was a small excitement. But now she realised that she would have to go in Frank's company, that she would be associating herself with him in his deception of the world around him. Besides, she reminded herself sternly, she had not come to Stotburne to enjoy herself, but to be with Henrietta at a time when one felt one ought to overlook a great deal. She felt some compunction, and she turned quickly to her sister.

"O Henrietta, I was forgetting that we should be leaving you all alone," she said. "I will write to Mrs Marriot and say I can't come."

"Nonsense!" cried Henrietta gaily. "You will do no such thing. As if I should mind being alone for one evening."

"Indeed, I shall not go," persisted Jessie. "I can't think why I was so stupid—but she will understand, won't she?"

"My dear Jessie, don't be absurd!" cried Henrietta. "I particularly want you to go. I want you to make friends with them; I am so fond of her, you know, and he is a dear old man. Didn't you like her very much?"

"Yes, she's very nice," said Jessie cautiously.

"And she must have been lovely when she was young and slim," continued Henrietta.

"She is pretty still," said Jessie. "But, Henrietta, really and truly I don't want to go."

But in the end Jessie did go as had been arranged. She did not dare give the real reason of her reluctance, and Henrietta overruled every other objection she put forward. Jessie submitted, and a couple of evenings later she and Frank started together to go up

to the Hall, leaving Henrietta smilingly protesting that she meant thoroughly to enjoy her solitary evening.

Indeed, Henrietta had even been looking forward to an evening by herself. It was something different from usual, and the mere fact of a change, however slight, had attractions for her. But when her husband and sister had disappeared across the dusky garden and the front door shut her in, a certain blankness fell upon her spirit.

She ate her dinner quickly, and without much satisfaction, and returned to the drawing-room. The emptiness of the room struck her as strange. Of course, she was constantly alone there at other times of the day, but somehow this evening she was so conscious that Jessie and Frank were out of the house. She looked round, not quite sure what she meant to do. The fact that there was no reason why she should choose one occupation rather than another diminished her desire to do anything.

She decided to sit cosily by the fire and read, and settling herself in an armchair she took up a novel, but she could not pay attention to it.

She could not help wondering how Jessie was getting on at the Hall. It was so amusing to think that she was actually there. Henrietta pictured her sister talking to the tall, thin, testy old man with such funny puffy lips and long nose, which was low at the bridge but spread upwards and outwards to wide nostrils. Would he be in a good temper? Would Jessie be afraid of him? In a way, it was a pity that Henrietta was not able to be there, so that Jessie might have seen the old man's charming, indulgent courtesy to her. However, Mrs Marriot would be sure to talk of her to Jessie, and that again was amusing. And not only amusing but desirable, for surely the opinion of a woman like that must have some effect on Jessie.

Henrietta began to brood over the last few days, to wonder what was Jessie's actual frame of mind. It was so difficult to tell what impression had been made upon her. She was very quiet, but also quite friendly. Friendly was just the word for it; but Henrietta felt disconsolately that she wanted something more than mere friendliness. Then a sort of sick weariness depressed her. It was so tiring to be always calculating how much she had gained in Jessie's opinion, to be always trying to gauge the effect on her sister of all her words, actions or surroundings. And it was so disheartening, too; she could not see that she had made any real impression upon her. "Oh, why did she worry about what Jessie thought? If only she could simply not care? It would be so much better—so much better."

Presently Henrietta recollected that she had not touched the piano since Miss Prout's arrival. Jessie was quite unmusical. Poor dear, she really was rather prosaic. Mrs Gore-Smythe rose from her chair, and crossing the room seated herself on the music stool. She opened the piano, and remained for a moment looking at the keys. What should she play? Chopin! Chopin suited her mood. His music always stirred her with big, thrilling, inarticulate emotions. She began to play one of the Nocturnes, and the haunting, poignant notes seemed to her to drop upon the silence without filling it. All the time she could hear the undisturbed quiet underneath the melody, and all the time she was aware that she was alone. Her heart was too full for speech; she enjoyed her sensations and wanted to cry.

But the Nocturne came to an end before her tears actually began to flow, and she had not the energy to play another. She let her hands fall on her lap, and her dissatisfaction returned. She hastily closed the piano and rose. How long the evening was! She

was tired and yet restless. The quiet and emptiness of the room were oppressive; the tables and chairs somehow looked unfamiliar and even antagonistic.

She took up her book again, and going to the sofa, she lay down. She read a few pages, and then, still holding her book, her thoughts wandered again.

Supposing Jessie and Dick Goulburn were to marry. She smiled. A match between Frank's plain, matter-of-fact brother and her plain, matter-of-fact sister was so appropriate that it was almost ridiculous. And she firmly believed that Dick was attracted by Jessie. She remembered various small indications of his consideration for her.

And then Dick knew everything! That other difficulty would not arise in connection with him. Her face grew gloomy; she dropped her book beside her, and lay staring in front of her with unseeing eyes.

That, of course, was what was disturbing her.

Until Jessie had spoken so bluntly it had not occurred to her that such a question might have to be faced again. As a matter of fact, the way in which an understanding had been achieved between her and Frank had led her to forget that Jessie had obliged her to tell him, and in her relief she had then believed that the matter was settled for ever. Now, she was not only reminded of Jessie's former insistence, but the problem was raised in a way that touched her sharply.

Some day her child would marry, and would conscience then require her to confess? She was intolerably harassed by the possibility, and she argued with herself as if it were a point that she had to settle at once. She assured herself that Frank would tell her that not only need she say nothing, but that she would be wrong to ruin her child's happiness and chances in life by a revelation that could only do harm and could achieve no

possible good. She assured herself that though Jessie was very good and upright, she was narrow-minded, and could not see more than one side of a question. And after all, did not she hear that verse read in church every Sunday—"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness?" Well, she had turned away from her wickedness, she was doing what was "lawful and right," and why should her wrong-doing be raked up again, and to serve no purpose? But in spite of everything she could think of, the tradition in which she had been brought up asserted itself. No reason that she could think of could quell her panic of conscience. She not only felt that she ought to confess, but the guilt of what she had done suddenly appalled her. Her imagination recalled John Harris's death-bed, the slow development of her deed and all the horrors that succeeded to it. The memories seemed burnt into her mind with hateful clearness. She could not escape them! She could not escape the future! If only some one would come! If only Frank were there!

Then all at once she recollected that Frank was in much the same position, and an immense relief quieted her. She was not alone in her predicament. The thought of Frank was a solace. He was so admirable, so clever and so wide-minded. Every one respected his opinion. She would be guided by him; she would abide by his example.

But supposing he should by any chance tell her to confess—what would she do then? Would she still submit to his judgment?

She shuddered and felt chill and sick at the thought.

But of course he could not do that. It was absurd to torment herself with such an idea, for if she confessed, he would have to confess too.

Again she was reassured by the knowledge that she was not alone in her position, and in the reviving sense of comfort and security she fell asleep.

Her sleep was troubled. She dreamt confusedly, obsessed by a horrible feeling of transparency; it seemed to her that every one who looked at her knew all about her, that it was futile to remain silent, because everything she wished to conceal was somehow apparent to all the world. Amongst the people who were turning from her in disgust was John Harris himself; and then she discovered that it was not John Harris, but her son, who for her punishment was cursed with John Harris's face, and there was no escape from him but to do the same thing again. . . .

Ah! She woke with a strangled shriek, and started up from the sofa. It seemed to her that she must have been asleep for hours. The fire was out, the grate was black and untidy with grey ashes. The silence was horrible. In an agony of terror she rushed to the bell, but at that moment the door opened and Frank and Jessie came in together. They had just returned, and it was the sound of the hall door that had awakened Henrietta.

With a cry, she ran to Mr Gore-Smythe, and clung to him.

"O Frank! O Frank!" she sobbed.

"My love!" he exclaimed in dismay. "Good Heavens! has anything happened?"

"O Frank! such a dreadful dream. And I thought—I thought—— Oh, it was dreadful! It was so dreadful!"

"My dear," he said gravely, putting her into an armchair and bending over her, while she still clung to him, "you are overwrought. Try and calm yourself."

"I knew we oughtn't to leave her," said Jessie, much concerned. "Shall I get some *sal volatile*?"

"No! No!" shrieked Henrietta. "Don't come near me! Go away, Jessie! Frank, I needn't tell? I needn't say anything ever?"

"My love, *no!*" cried Frank, and he turned on Jessie with sudden sternness. "Is this your doing? What have you been saying to her?"

"I—I—I——" stammered Jessie, half wrathful, half dismayed.

"Oh, don't scold her," cried Henrietta, "or she'll go away and leave me, and I want her! I want her particularly! O Jessie! Jessie! Jessie!"

Then Jessie took command. She came forward and quietly swept the astonished Frank to one side. She put her arm round Henrietta, who hid her face against her sister's shoulder.

"My darling," said Jessie, "I'll never go away while you want me." Then looking up at Mr Gore-Smythe, she added with dignity: "Will you ring the bell, please, Frank—or no, perhaps you would go yourself and send Nurse Parkins here."

CHAPTER XIX

THE next day Lady Amabel Richardson, the wife of the member, drove over to lunch at Stotburne Hall to talk over the arrangements for a Charity Bazaar. Mrs Conybeare was also there, but the Vicar had been detained at the last moment.

"So vexing, dear Mrs Marriot," said Mrs Conybeare. "Thomas begs that you won't wait. He will come as soon as he can get rid of Mrs Simpson. Yes, it's Mrs Ned Simpson again. Her husband has got into some fresh trouble."

"Fresh trouble!" cried the Squire. "Of course he has got into fresh trouble! Rogers caught him poaching last night. Caught the feller red-handed. In the very act of setting a snare."

"Oh dear, dear! You don't say so!" sighed Mrs Conybeare. "And that poor wife of his is such a nice woman. But please, Mrs Marriot, don't wait for Thomas."

As soon as they had begun lunch, Lady Amabel turned the talk upon the matter under discussion. She was a brisk, fresh-coloured young woman, who undertook conversation with a business-like determination to be apt.

"The first thing is to make out a list of who would be likely to help," she said. "I know I can count on several people near us. Who is there here? How about Mrs Gore-Smythe?"

"The very person for it," cried Mrs Marriot.

"And she is always so ready to join in anything. She is so charming, isn't she?"

"Well rather—er—too girlish, don't you think?" said Lady Amabel. "No harm in her, of course, but I confess I find her a little wearisome."

"Well, but you know, dear Lady Amabel, she is very young," said Mrs Marriot, beaming apologetically, "and she is so sweet and unaffected. I must say I'm very fond of her."

"By the way, is it true that she has been married before?" enquired Lady Amabel.

Mrs Conybeare looked as if she knew a great deal more than she meant to disclose.

"Yes," she said, "though she is so young, she has been through a great deal."

"Poor child," said Mrs Marriot.

"I suppose her first marriage was not happy," said Lady Amabel coolly; "but that generally means faults on both sides."

"Oh, undoubtedly," said Mrs Conybeare; "but there are exceptions."

"Anyway, she is happy now," said Mrs Marriot, with a genial laugh.

"I wonder why she chose to marry Mr Gore-Smythe," said Lady Amabel. "I find him such a bore. Oh, no doubt most estimable, but so ponderous."

"Let me give you some more beef," said the Squire, carving a delicately thin slice. "Gore-Smythe is a student, you know. He's not a social man."

"Now, Lady Amabel, have you read his article in the last *Contemporary*?" cried Mrs Marriot. "Most interesting. A little beyond me in places, but then I don't pretend to understand these social questions." She turned to the Vicar's wife: "Didn't Mr Conybeare think it very interesting?"

"Thomas said it was very sound," said Mrs Conybeare, a little doubtfully. "He said it was so sound that no one need read it."

Lady Amabel laughed, but Mrs Marriot looked perplexed.

"But surely that is a reason for reading it?" she said; "at least I should have thought so. By the way, you know Mrs Gore-Smythe's sister is here? She has come to stay with them. Have you met her?"

"No," said Lady Amabel. "Is she like her sister?"

"Not in the least," cried the two ladies together.

"Ah, here is Mr Conybeare," added Mrs Marriot, as the Vicar came into the room. He shook hands and sat down with his usual air of dislocation.

"You've come at the right moment, Conybeare," said the Squire. "The ladies have all been talking scandal."

"O Mr Marriot, you can't call it scandal!" protested Mrs Conybeare.

"Well, but then let's talk what you can call scandal," said the Vicar; "it is much more interesting than anything else."

"Psha!" muttered the Squire testily.

"Lady Amabel wanted to know if Miss Prout were like her sister," interposed Mrs Marriot hastily. "I say not in the least."

"She is not nearly so attractive," said Mrs Conybeare. "She's not actually plain, but she is certainly not the least pretty, and then she has so little to say."

"Well now, you know, I think Miss Prout has more distinction than Mrs Gore-Smythe," remarked the Vicar, but his wife and Mrs Marriot both protested emphatically.

"How can you say so?" cried Mrs Marriot. "Miss Prout has no presence whatever. A very good little

thing I've no doubt, and her sister is evidently devoted to her."

"Rather more devoted than her brother-in-law, I should say," remarked Mrs Conybeare.

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs Marriot, much interested. Mrs Conybeare nodded.

"I suspect so," she said swiftly. "I gather that that is the case from many little indications. Not that Mrs Gore-Smythe has said anything to me about it. She would not, naturally, but I'm sure he and Miss Prout do not get on."

"Dear me, I wonder why," said Mrs Marriot. "Do you think her family disapproved of the marriage?"

"That doesn't seem likely," said Mrs Conybeare. "A man of his learning, and evidently they have quite sufficient means. I'm sure they are very comfortably off."

"I daresay Miss Prout has a temper," said Mrs Marriot thoughtfully. "She looked as if she had; there again, so very unlike dear Mrs Gore-Smythe."

"Ah, now I'm not so sure that I agree with you there," said Mr Conybeare in his high, drawling voice.

"Now Mr Conybeare, if you are going to disparage my dear Mrs Gore-Smythe, or him either, I'm not going to listen to you," said Mrs Marriot, laughing.

"I disparage them!" exclaimed Mr Conybeare. "I assure you I'm the last person to do that. I like the Gore-Smythes. They are nice people. I wish that my whole parish consisted of Gore-Smythes. They are much nicer than the poor. Poor people live in stuffy rooms, and get drunk and beat their wives, and if I speak to them as I should to ordinary grown-up people they don't understand me. My intercourse with them is reduced to telling them not to drink too much because it will make them drunk, and not to beat their wives because bruises hurt. But if every cottage were inhabited by a Mr and

Mrs Gore-Smythe I should enjoy going to see my parishioners. It might be a little monotonous after a time, but at any rate they would speak the same language that I do; and then they are sufficiently removed from the elementary to take care that I should never know it if they did do wrong. One can preach to people like that. It gives one scope to spread one's ideas, and it's no use, you know, telling people to be good who are not good already."

"But," exclaimed Mrs Marriot, half laughing, half bewildered, "do you mean to tell me that if one does wrong one ought to conceal it?"

"There's something to be said for doing so," replied Mr Conybeare; "it serves a practical purpose in maintaining a standard of respectability."

"Psha!" muttered the Squire, again restraining his impatience with difficulty.

Mrs Marriot looked dissatisfied and Mrs Conybeare hastened to interpose.

"Don't pay any attention to him," she said, "he doesn't mean one-half of what he says."

"Well, anyway I don't believe Mrs Gore-Smythe has a bad temper," said Mrs Marriot.

"By the way," said Mr Conybeare, "I forgot to tell you there's now a little Gore-Smythe to carry on the traditions of the family."

"Really!" cried Mrs Marriot eagerly.

"O Thomas, why didn't you say so before?" said Mrs Conybeare. "How do you know?"

"I met Gore-Smythe on my way here," replied the Vicar, "and he told me."

"Is it a boy or a girl?" asked Mrs Marriot.

The Vicar hesitated.

"I think he said a girl, yes, I'm almost sure he said a girl."

CHAPTER XX

THE same letter that informed Dick Goulburn of the birth of his niece invited him to be her godfather.

It was the first letter he opened that morning. He read it through carefully, and then propped it up in front of him against the coffee-pot, while he looked at the rest of his correspondence. According to his habit he wrote his replies in the intervals of eating his breakfast, but whenever his eyes rested on Frank's minute caligraphy, he paused to regard it with a slightly antagonistic air. Presently he seized the coffee-pot to fill up his cup, and the letter fell forward upon his plate; he picked it up, flattened it, and propped it against the slop-basin.

When he had finished his breakfast, and his other letters were disposed of, he again took it up. He turned his chair sideways, and leant back, crossing his legs, and drumming gently with the fingers of his left hand upon the table.

A daughter! And she entered the world under the guardianship of Frank and Henrietta! Hardly a propitious beginning for the troublesome business of life!

Dick felt a little rueful. Of course, he had known at the back of his mind that this form of the problem was likely to occur, but at the time of his brother's marriage he had been so much occupied with the facts of the moment that he had given it no serious consideration.

If he had thought about it at all, he had simply

speculated as to the effect upon Frank and Henrietta, but now he found himself involved in greater responsibility than he had bargained for. Was heredity a real danger? He was generally sceptical about theories of the sort, but in the present instance he could not dismiss the possibility without misgiving. If children did inherit characteristics from their parents, what sort of a chance was there for this little girl? Personally, he had much faith in the effects of a sound education, but then, did that surmount the difficulty of this particular case? Of course, the Gore-Smythes would be careful to bring her up on recognised lines; no one could doubt that. But . . . can a thief teach honesty? Well, it was not impossible. Indeed, to a greater or less degree, it was an everyday occurrence.

Perhaps, even in such a case as this, convention might supply the place of conviction.

And the confounded irony of it all was that they asked him to be godfather! No, that he would *not* agree to. It would be an impossible position—impossible! He began to wish that he had never meddled in the affair, but, hang it all as long as it only concerned Frank and Henrietta, it was humorous; besides, he had been good enough to give them a leg up. Now, however, when a little innocent child was involved, and that altered the whole question.

The vehemence of his determination made him look at the letter again, as if the reading of it brought him into actual contact with the writer.

"Henrietta particularly wishes you to stand sponsor to our dear little daughter; her sister, Miss Prout, and Mrs Conybeare, our vicar's wife, are to be her godmothers."

Dick rubbed his forehead.

If he could be sure of having any real say in the child's education he might consent. He *might* consent. Perhaps, all things considered, it was even incumbent on him. That was a side of the question that he had not faced.

So Miss Prout was going to be godmother. Miss Prout; hum, yes, Miss Pottinger; Jessie! Ah, now, Jessie!

Well, if she exerted her influence, there might be some chance for the poor little child. Just like her to undertake it! And she was much less responsible than he in the question of the marriage. She had been perfectly consistent all through, and under most trying circumstances. Indeed, if one came to think of it, there could not be much in the theory of heredity, since she and Henrietta came from the same origin; or if there were, the child might equally well develop some of Jessie's admirable qualities.

Dick sighed. He would, as Frank put it, stand sponsor. It was his duty. Everything pointed towards it. He twisted round his chair to the table, took a sheet of note-paper, wrote his answer, closed and stamped it, and then went out himself to the post.

During the days that followed he found that his thoughts were frequently occupied with Jessie. He was glad he was going to see her again. A year ago at Sandgate he had been brought into close contact with her without any of the usual social preliminaries, but he had parted from her without regret. It was natural that they should part; the matter over which they had met was completed. He had known, of course, that they would see each other again some day.

But now that the meeting was imminent he felt a keen curiosity concerning her. He wondered whether she had changed, whether they would resume

acquaintance on the old terms, or if they would have to re-establish an understanding. Yes, he was glad he was going to see her again. He had a high opinion of her. It occurred to him in a quite impersonal way that she would make an excellent wife. She was a woman one could revere; the sort of woman who would make a good mother. And yet here she was past her first youth, unmarried! Men were indiscriminating fools. But then, was it not just the bloom of her virtue that no one would really appreciate her who did not know her intimately? Now he himself had had the advantage of confidential daily intercourse with her, and . . .

"God bless my soul, why shouldn't I?" he thought suddenly. He looked round the room where he was sitting with an air of startled enquiry, and tried to imagine how much difference Jessie's presence would make to it. Why not? Why not? He had never wanted to marry before, because he had never before been able to relax his stilted formality with an unmarried woman. He idealised women, he was bored by them, and he knew nothing about them. He could not realise what daily life would be with any one of his feminine acquaintance, except Jessie, and the more he thought of her, the more confident he felt that she would never upset him by unaccountable behaviour.

He started up from his chair, and proceeded to investigate every room in the house. He regarded each apartment from different standpoints, from the door, the window, the fireplace; he sat on the chairs, he opened the cupboards, and wherever he went, he divined a possible new aspect of the familiar objects. The house became interesting.

He carefully thought over all that he could recollect of his mother's habits; she had been a quiet woman with a strong personality, and his

memory of her influence was vivid. Jessie would fill her place worthily; she would restore that indefinable something that had been lacking at the Boltons ever since Mrs Goulburn's death.

In one of the spare rooms Dick was seized with an excited sense of the ludicrous. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and covering his eyes with one hand, he shook with laughter. How surprised every one would be! He, the confirmed bachelor, to marry a wife! What would Frank say? And Henrietta? Would they like it? Dick was not at all sure that they would be altogether pleased, but that did not disturb him at all! Indeed, for the moment he had no room for any other emotion but astonishment at the revolution in his own ideas.

"God bless my soul!" he ejaculated again. "Well, but why not? Why not?"

The christening was to take place when the baby was about five weeks old, and one day towards the end of April Dick arrived at Albury Station. It was characteristic of him that he had not told the Gore-Smythes by what train to expect him. Finding that there was no conveyance to be had at the tiny station, he asked the way from the porter, and leaving his portmanteau to be brought by the milk-cart, he set out to walk the three miles into Stotburne.

One or two labourers who met him looked with curiosity at the short, sturdy, red-haired man in a wide-awake hat who stumped along with a stiff, indefatigable gait. From time to time he stood still, looked round over the sunlit fields, and raised his hat, while he wiped his forehead with an enormous white silk handkerchief. In the village he again asked his way, and the house was described to him. He proceeded along the lane till he reached the door in the wall with the steps leading up to it. He

mounted these quickly, and let himself into the old-fashioned garden. In front of him the flagged path led to the front door; on his right was a strip of lawn bordered by a bed of tulips brilliant against the mellow grey of the surrounding wall. On his left the ground rose in two broad, shallow terraces to the rose-garden, which ended in a cluster of bushes and trees, laburnum, lilac, and thick green shrubs under the sombre shade of an old ilex.

At one end of the lower terrace was a garden seat set in the angle of a squarely-trimmed box hedge, and here he saw sitting a slim woman in a garden hat and pale grey gown, a baby in long clothes on her lap.

Henrietta? No, of course not; it was Jessie. He was sure it was Jessie. He recognised something about her attitude. Instead of going to the front door he cut across to the terrace, bounded over the three steps leading up to it, causing Miss Prout to raise her eyes with a startled look. He took off his hat and went towards her.

"Mr Goulburn!" she exclaimed, adding immediately: "We were expecting to hear from you so that we could send to meet you. Have you walked from the station? Henrietta is out driving. Frank has taken her. She will be so sorry not to have been at home when you arrived. Oh, and your luggage! I must go and tell them to send for it——"

"Madam, I beg!" he interrupted. "Miss Prout, pray on no account disturb yourself! My portmanteau is coming in the milk-cart."

"The milk-cart?" she repeated. "Oh yes. But I'm afraid it does not pass here till about six o'clock. Will that do? And you have walked all the way from Albury? Henrietta will be grieved."

As she spoke she recollected her own arrival, and she thought how wise he had been to avoid a

tête-à-tête drive with Frank, though naturally he would not have suffered as she had.

Mr Goulburn was gazing down at the white bundle on her lap with mingled suspicion and curiosity.

"Is that *It*?" he asked.

She laughed softly and raised the thick knitted veil that covered the baby's tiny red face.

"Yes, this is *It*!" she said.

"By George!" he said thoughtfully, and she put the veil down again.

"She might catch cold," she explained.

"What are they going to call her?" he enquired.

"Haven't they told you? Amaryllis," she replied.

"Amaryllis?"

"Yes; it *is* rather fanciful," she said; "but it is a pretty name. It's Henrietta's choice."

"So I imagined," said Dick. He sat down on the seat beside her. "How are they?" he enquired.

"Very well," she replied, adding after a slight hesitation: "They are very happy."

He nodded slowly.

"Have *you* seen them since?" she asked.

"No," said Dick; "but I read his article in the *Contemporary*," he added quickly, with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

"He's working very hard at his book," she said.

"He reads political economy, and philosophy, and sociology in the evening after dinner when he is sitting with us in the drawing-room, and he marks the passages that he thinks will be useful. In the morning he shuts himself up in the library and takes notes. I don't think he has begun to write the book yet. Henrietta says he is so thorough."

"Ah!" remarked Dick. "Have you been here long?"

"About six weeks," Jessie said looking a little depressed.

Mr Goulburn pondered for a little.

"Madam—Miss Prout," he said, "pardon me if my question is indiscreet, but I would be glad to know your opinion of—of what you have seen here."

"O Mr Goulburn," said Jessie piteously, "don't ask me what I think. I don't know. I really don't know. I have never been so perplexed. In a way, everything is all right. They are very happy, but—but—I can't help feeling—I mean, I don't know what is right or what is wrong, and I'm sure that I am doing wrong. You see, I do care for Henrietta! I always have."

"Miss Prout, whatever else I may doubt, I am convinced that you invariably act from the highest motives," said Dick.

"Don't say that," said Jessie, perilously near tears. "You don't know—and I—I can't explain."

"I have every confidence in your judgment," said Dick obstinately.

Jessie laughed a little hysterically.

"Frank says that I have none," she said, and Dick thumped his knees with his fists.

"Confound his impudence!" he exclaimed. "Miss Prout, I beg your pardon."

"Oh, hush!" she protested; "you will wake the baby."

"God bless my soul! I haven't, have I?" he asked anxiously, and Miss Prout laughed again.

"She would soon make herself heard if you had."

Dick gazed at Jessie in silence for some minutes. Not pretty, no! She was nothing so commonplace. She was something apart; small as she was, she had the dignity of womanhood, and the feeling above all others that she roused in him was reverence. And she was evidently quite unconscious of his scrutiny. She was thinking gravely.

"Mr Goulburn," she said presently.

He bent towards her, all attention.

"Do you—do you believe in heredity?" she asked.

"Madam," said Dick with emphasis, "of one thing I am quite sure, and that is that no one knows anything at all about it."

"Do you really think so?" she said wistfully.

"I do. There are just enough instances of apparently inherited tendencies to enable scientists to support their theories; but that is all," said Mr Goulburn. "And when a child grows up quite unlike his known relations, they explain it by saying he must be like his unknown relations. For all we know, Amaryllis may inherit her character from some one who lived in the reign of Henry VIII."

Jessie turned her eyes upon him thoughtfully.

"I do wonder," she said, "what sort of a life lies before her; don't you?"

CHAPTER XXI

FRANK was put out.

"Why can't Dick behave like other people!" he complained as he stood ready dressed for dinner with his back to the fire in Henrietta's room. "The idea of arriving at Albury like that! Nothing to meet him! A good three miles to walk! And his baggage sent up in the milk-cart! I intended to go and meet him myself. Indeed, there was no reason why you should not have driven in that direction as much as in any other. We could both have met him."

"It was certainly very odd," said Henrietta, who was lying on the sofa, looking a little delicate but very pretty. "It would have been so easy to send a postcard. But you've always told me that he is eccentric."

"Eccentric! Yes," said Frank. "And you see now that I did not speak without reason. That is why we have never been able to get on as well as I should wish. I dislike that kind of thing; I disapprove of it. It's a cheap method of obtaining a reputation for cleverness, and the indulgence of a wish for singularity generally means dispensing with all—er—foresight, all consideration for other people. It leads, as a consequence, to most unsatisfactory situations. Why, in this very instance I consider it

was highly undesirable that no one but Jessie should have been at home to receive him."

"O Frank!" said Henrietta with a little laugh. "Do you know, I even think that may have been a little bit fortunate."

"My dear child," said Frank benignly, "I assure you you are hoping for the impossible. Dick is not a marrying man, and if he were, I very much doubt whether it would be a wise thing for him and Jessie to marry."

"I think it would make Jessie happy," pleaded Henrietta. "And I do so want her to be happy."

Frank stroked his chin.

"I could wish that Jessie showed a more tractable spirit," he remarked.

"She has a very dreary life, you must remember," said Mrs Gore-Smythe. "I am certain that is one reason why she is so difficult to get on with."

"I am sure we have done everything to make her happy here," said Frank; "people have been most kind in asking her out. Generally it has been she who has held back. No, dear; you are always ready to make the best of people, but I fear that Jessie's disposition is not calculated to make either herself happy or those she comes in contact with. She is too independent. Independence is not a womanly trait. To my mind the difference between masculine and feminine traits should be fostered. The happiness and virtue of home life is largely founded upon these differences."

"But Frank——" began Henrietta.

"Well, darling?"

"I do think she and Dick would suit each other very well," she said a little wistfully; "but, of course, if you really don't like it, I won't do anything to encourage it."

Frank bent over her tenderly and kissed her upturned face.

"Darling, don't you think they are old enough to settle their own affairs?" he said. "But I do know this: I am very glad that my own dear wife is a true woman, a womanly woman."

The gong for dinner sounded, and Frank descended to the drawing-room, where Dick and Jessie, both in evening dress, were waiting for him.

At dinner Frank returned to his grievance.

"Well, Goulburn," he said, "I see your things *have* turned up all right."

"Duly delivered by the milk-cart," said Dick.

"I wonder you didn't wait to come in the milk-cart yourself?" said Frank in a jocular tone. "I must say I don't think you are the proper kind of godfather for Amaryllis. What do you think, Jessie? Isn't there a danger that he will encourage her in all sorts of freaks and whims?"

"Oh," said Jessie seriously, "I don't think so."

Dick chuckled.

"Surely you don't want your daughter to grow up conventional?" he said.

Frank leant forward to fill up Dick's glass with claret.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I have come to have a great horror of any display of eccentricity—especially in women. To start with, it is not genuine; it is simply done to attract notice, and from the moment a woman is trying to attract notice she not only loses her charm but she limits the scope of her activities. Her real sphere, which is incalculably far-reaching in its effects, is a hidden one; her enterprise is in regions where man does not compete. But does she entertain the desire to make herself conspicuous, and straightway she enters the arena with men, for which she is totally unfitted, and she descends to an altogether anomalous position."

During this speech Jessie glanced furtively at Dick. She wished he would dispute everything his brother said. Secretly, she agreed with Frank, but she hated agreeing with him; she hated his pleasant voice; she hated the urbane way he presided at the head of the table. She was angry because she could not reasonably find fault with him; without ever being officious he was an attentive host, and he carved beautifully. When Henrietta was not there she even resented the charming appointment of the table, with its fine shining tablecloth, the flowers, the shaded candles, and the bright glass and silver.

"I hope my duties don't include pointing out to Amaryllis where her real sphere lies," said Dick.

Frank smiled.

"Don't be alarmed," he said; "we will be quite satisfied if you will promise not to teach her to be capricious."

"By the way," said Dick, glancing at him, "I read your article the other day."

A faint flush showed upon Frank's cheeks.

"Ah, yes, to be sure," he said carelessly. "In treating the bigger subject these incidental questions arise."

"I happened to be staying with Mrs Bellingham at the time," remarked Dick. "She was much impressed when she heard I knew the author."

Frank glanced at him quickly. He raised his glass, and thoughtfully sipped his wine.

"I daresay you are surprised at the attitude I have taken in it," he began.

"No," said Mr Goulburn hastily; "it is just what I should have expected."

Frank looked taken aback.

"Really?" he ejaculated in a flat voice, but recovering himself immediately, he went on: "You would

have been quite justified in feeling some astonishment, for I admit I have materially changed my point of view."

Dick again interrupted him precipitately.

"I foresee you will bring up Amaryllis on a course of moral philosophy. Isn't her name rather untoward? Can an Amaryllis be amenable to moral philosophy?"

Frank smiled.

"I say with Shakespeare, 'What's in a name?'" he replied. "But you misunderstand me. I should not like any daughter of mine to be a bluestocking. On the contrary——"

"By the by," enquired Mr Goulburn, "when does Amaryllis become Amaryllis? When is the christening to take place?"

"On Thursday. I hope it will be fine," said Jessie, meeting his eye with sympathy. Did he realise how many meals she had had alone with Frank? Could he guess what she had suffered?

"Who is this Mrs Bellingham?" asked Mr Gore-Smythe. "Is she a new friend of yours? I don't remember hearing you speak of her before."

"I have known her a good many years," replied Dick.

"You say she had read my article?" said Frank.

"You don't happen to know of any one who wants a house in the country, do you?" asked Goulburn. "Her husband died the other day, and she is giving up her house at Hadbury—in Hertfordshire, you know. She wants to find something smaller."

Frank considered the question.

"I'm afraid I don't," he said. "But there is a house about a couple of miles away from here that might suit *her*. Do you know what she wants?"

Jessie rose, and Frank held open the door for her to pass out.

In the hall she paused. She ought to go up as

usual to Henrietta, and she went to the foot of the stairs. Here she stopped again, and stood with her hands clasped together on the curved end of the banisters.

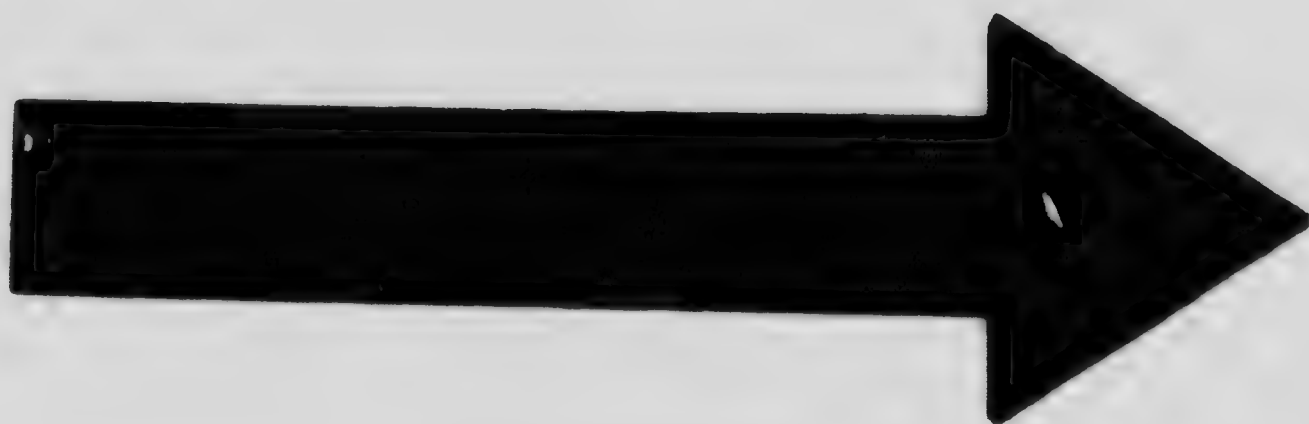
The hall was dimly lighted, and her small figure in a soft black net gown looked as if a part of the shadows. Her bare arms and her face and neck gleamed with an unsubstantial whiteness.

She did not want to go up to her sister. But she did not want to stay downstairs either. She glanced about her with a sudden rebellious distaste to her surroundings, and she discovered at the same time that she was actually afraid of Frank and Henrietta. There was something subtly abnormal about them, something overwhelming. Formerly she had known her own opinions; she had respected herself; she had been firm and brave, and it had fallen to her to help and advise Henrietta. Now she was being swept along in their wake—protesting, it is true, but protesting feebly. She felt almost as if she were physically shrinking, while they were growing to a superhuman size.

A sick longing to be out of it all possessed her. She must go home. She would go as soon as the christening was over, the very next day, in the morning. She could not bear it any longer.

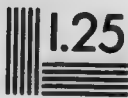
If only she could go now, this very minute, without waiting for the christening, without waiting even for daylight! She pictured herself putting on a hat and coat, and walking boldly out of the front door into the strange, lonely night. But what then? Three miles to the station, no train till morning, and— Oh, of course it was absurd! Just as if they would try to keep her against her will! Just as if she were not perfectly free to come and go as she wished!

No, not perfectly free. She had engaged to stand



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godmother to the baby: if she left before Friday they might reasonably feel themselves slighted. Such a proceeding would be unkind, inconsiderate!

Yet the thought of another three days there filled her with a sense of discouragement. Three days only, and she had been there more than six weeks! She could not understand why now her spirit suddenly quailed.

And if she went home, home to her old father and mother, what sort of a life lay before her?

She loved them and they loved her. Daily life with them presented no complications; but was there not an element of hopelessness in it? The only change would be when death took them, and left her alone.

She bowed her head upon her clasped hands, and cried quietly.

A movement in the dining-room startled her, and she fled precipitately into the drawing-room, regretting the next moment that she had not escaped to her own room.

However, most likely Frank would take Mr Goulburn up to see Henrietta, or if Henrietta were tired, to the library to see his notes. She listened intently. Yes, they *were* going upstairs.

She stood by the hearth, her back to the door, and stared into the fire, trying to check the tears that welled into her eyes so easily and so fast. She *must* stop crying and go upstairs. In another minute Henrietta would send some one to look for her.

The door opened behind her.

"Jessie!" exclaimed Frank's indignant voice. "Then you *are* here?" He came up to her. "How is it you have not been up to Henrietta this evening?" he demanded. "She is quite disturbed about you."

"I am sorry," said Jessie, in a slightly tremulous voice, "but I was not feeling quite well."

"Not well!" exclaimed Frank suspiciously. "Surely you were all right at dinner time?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Jessie impatiently. "I will go up to her now."

"The nurse has gone down to her supper, and Henrietta has been alone for the last half-hour," he continued severely. "As soon as she told me you had not been with her, I thought it possible that you were not well, and I went to knock at your *bedroom* door. It never occurred to me that you were waiting down *here*, in the *drawing-room*. Were you faint?"

He suspected that she had remained downstairs on the chance of seeing Dick, and his tone expressed a complete disbelief in her excuse.

Jessie became crimson.

"I'm afraid after all I cannot come to Henrietta now," she said. "I will go straight to my room. And will you tell her, Frank," she added, "what I have been intending to tell you both — that I find I must return home on Friday? Good-night."

She did not wait for a reply, but went swiftly past him, and out of the room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE weather changed, and Thursday morning was wet. It was a still, quiet, warm day; the sky was of an unbroken grey, and the only sound was the soft, creeping stir of the rain.

In the afternoon, however, the rain stopped, and paler patches of cloud floated over the murky sky. Henrietta and Jessie and the baby drove to the church; Frank and Dick walked. They found Mrs Conybeare already there, and a few minutes later Mrs Marriot pushed open the door and came up to Henrietta, beaming and congratulatory.

Amaryllis neither slept nor cried. She lay in Jessie's arms with her cloudy eyes open, vaguely agitating her tiny fists under her long embroidered cloak.

Presently Mr Conybeare came out of the vestry, delicately gaunt and stooping, and looking unusually elongated in his surplice and cassock.

As they gathered round the font Henrietta was thrilled by a sudden emotion. The little church was almost dark; the mottled grey walls and peaked roof enclosed a profound quiet. Mr Conybeare's surplice and the baby's robe were coldly white, with long dark shadows in the folds. Jessie, small and grave in her grey gown, was standing with a neat sedateness, her head slightly bent over the child in her arms. The others were mere figures in the

group; all detail was lost in the dim light. Henrietta perceived that the cluster of people, and the grey and the white were harmonious; yes, almost beautiful. And then—and then—this little scene meant so much! It meant the fulfilment of many hopes, and the birth of yet more. Tears of deep contentment welled into her eyes.

The whole company returned to Croft House to have tea in honour of Amaryllis.

"Her first party," said Henrietta gaily, as she sat in the corner of the sofa, her daughter on her lap, while Jessie poured out the tea.

"How good she was!" exclaimed Mrs Marriot, whose portly form filled the armchair in which she was seated.

"Don't they say that when a baby cries at its christening it's taking leave of the devil?" asked Dick, as he offered a plate of small cakes to her. "Rather awkward if she's kept her little devil, after all."

"But perhaps there was no little devil to go," suggested Henrietta.

"You mustn't say that, Mrs Gore-Smythe," said Mr Conybeare; "it isn't orthodox."

"She's very heavy," remarked Jessie, glancing up as she handed a cup to Dick Goulburn.

"Yes, she's a splendid baby," said the Vicar's wife.

"Dr Willoughby was saying so only the other day."

"Oh, I am so sorry Dr Willoughby is retiring," said Henrietta. "I like him so much. I suppose you haven't heard yet who is going to take his practice?"

"Oh yes. I meant to tell you," replied Mrs Conybeare. "I heard from Mrs Willoughby this morning. It's a Dr Mathews. He comes from somewhere near Ipswich, I think."

"*Mathews! Ipswich!*" In a flash Henrietta saw

gain the doctor's wife coming towards her on the Leas at Folkestone! Again she experienced the horror of that moment when Mrs Mathews deliberately looked her in the face and passed her by! How could any misfortune as colossal as this be announced in so ordinary a voice? And she herself had asked the question quite casually! She had a physical sensation of an enveloping cold and darkness, but she knew that she must not give way. She must keep control of herself; she must conceal the cramping terror in her heart. It seemed to her incredible that so much commotion was not visible to every one, and yet they were still talking, though she could not make out what they were saying. Something was happening to the walls and floor; a misty instability disorganised the furniture. Her strength was ebbing from her. If only Jessie would take the baby!

But at that very moment Jessie was bending over her, and lifting Amaryllis from her lap. As their eyes met she knew that Jessie too had heard.

"Dear Henrietta, this has been too much for you," said Miss Prout in her most collected tones. Immediately there was a hum of sympathetic voices, and Henrietta yielded to the growing faintness with a sense of relief in a perfectly ordinary excuse for giving way. She dimly saw Frank's face above her, protecting and concerned, and she was certain that he had realised nothing. She heard Mrs Conybeare say empathically: "Make her lie right down on the sofa—right down—no, no cushions." And then all vanished in a merciful oblivion.

When she recovered a few minutes later, she was still there, but only Frank, Miss Prout, and the nurse were with her.

She opened her eyes, looked at Jessie, and covering her face with her hands she broke into violent weeping.

"My poor darling!" cried Frank.

"A pretty state of affairs, upon my word," grumbled the nurse, offering her *sal volatile*. "Come, Mrs Gore-Smythe, drink some of this. And then you must come straight away up to bed. It's been altogether too much for her, and I'm not surprised. I'd nothing to say against her going to the church, if she'd 'ave lain down after and rested properly."

As soon as Henrietta had recovered a little further, Frank carried her upstairs to her room, and then he and Jessie left her to the nurse.

"This is very disappointing," said Frank anxiously as they walked together along the passage. "I thought, I *hoped* she was stronger than this shows her to be. She has seemed so well lately. I fear we have let her presume on her strength. I fear we have."

Jessie did not answer for a moment. Then she stood still.

"Frank, I think I had better tell you——" she began.

He looked at her in alarm.

"What do you mean, Jessie?" he asked sharply. "She is not seriously ill?"

"Oh, no, no! not that," she replied hastily; "but——"

"But what?" he asked. "My dear Jessie, can't you see that I am exceedingly anxious?"

"Come into the library," she said; "I can't tell you here."

He led the way with an air of exasperation and opened the library door for her to pass in. She went into the centre of the room and turned round towards him. He closed the door with ostentatious care.

"Frank," she said at once, "Henrietta fainted from a shock, not from physical fatigue. The doctor who is taking Dr Willoughby's practice is

the doctor who used to attend us at home. I mean before——"

Frank stared at her, petrified. Slowly his jaw dropped and his face became livid. He passed his hand two or three times over his forehead.

"Good God!" he ejaculated under his breath. Then turning upon her peremptorily he demanded: "You are sure of this? You are quite sure?"

"I'm afraid it is beyond a doubt," said Jessie gravely. "Mrs Conybeare said it was a Dr Mathews from near Ipswich. It must be the same. Besides, anybody from that neighbourhood would know."

Some one knocked at the door.

"Who is it?" cried Frank angrily. "What do you want? I am busy. Oh, it's you?" he added as the nurse appeared in the doorway.

"Please, sir, will you come to Mrs Gore-Smythe," she said. "I can't get her quiet at all, and she keeps asking for you and Miss Prout."

Frank said nothing, but strode away towards Henrietta's room. Jessie followed hurriedly.

"I'll ring for you if we want you, nurse," she said over her shoulder.

They found Henrietta sitting up in bed, a white shawl round her shoulders. A high colour burned in her usually white cheeks.

"O Frank, Frank!" she wailed, as soon as she saw him. Then looking at Jessie: "Have you told him?"

Frank went to the side of her bed, and she seized the lapels of his coat.

"Has she told you?"

"Hush, my dear child," he said. "Yes, Jessie has told me. It is—it is very calamitous!"

"And just as we were so happy!" moaned Henrietta, hiding her face against her husband's shoulder. "I shall never feel safe again! Never!"

Frank put his arm round her, but he was not quite at ease; he was being hurried into a demonstration of feeling before he was ready for it. He wanted time to think the situation over, and it was impossible to think it over while she was clinging to him in a hysterical state of excitement.

"My love," he said firmly, "you will make yourself ill if you give way like this. Try and control yourself. Lie down now, and try to rest, and——"

"No, no, Frank, don't leave me," cried Henrietta wildly. "I can't bear it if you leave me. We must talk it over together. We must settle something at once. We *must*!"

"But, darling, you will be much better able to discuss the question later on if you will rest now."

"I can't rest, I can't!" she cried. "How can you suggest it?"

"Well but, Henrietta," said Jessie, in a calm voice, "you must remember that we need not come to a decision to-night. To-morrow we could talk it over with Mr Goulburn——"

"Oh, Dick will help. Fetch Dick, Jessie!" cried Henrietta. "Does he know? Have you told him? Yes, fetch him, Jessie! Now! Quickly!"

Miss Prout looked doubtfully at Frank.

"Listen!" pleaded Henrietta. "I will promise to lie down and be quite quiet if you will fetch him and talk it over with him here. I will indeed. Only" —her voice became husky and uncertain — "I — I can't bear it if you leave me all alone. Don't you see? Can't you understand?"

The tears filled her eyes, and she put up one hand to hide them.

Jessie's heart swelled with compassion. She did not wait for Frank to reply.

"Dearest, I will go and find him at once," she said, and she went out of the room to look for Dick.

She knew he was not in the library, and she began to descend the stairs. Dick was crossing the hall, and saw her; he came to the foot of the stairs, and she paused where she was, a few steps from the bottom, one hand resting on the balusters.

"How is Henrietta?" he asked.

"O Mr Goulburn, I was just coming to fetch you," said Jessie. "Such a dreadful thing has happened. The man who is coming to take Dr Willoughby's practice here is the doctor from our old home. That's why Henrietta fainted."

Dick's lips took the shape of a whistle, but a suspicion of amusement showed suddenly in his eyes. However, he neither laughed nor whistled out of respect for Jessie; he only exclaimed:

"By George! you don't say so?"

"Will you come?" said Jessie. "Henrietta wants us all to discuss together what is to be done."

They found Henrietta still sitting upright, and Frank standing by her holding her hand, but with a harassed frown on his face.

"Oh, I am so glad you've come!" cried Henrietta feverishly. "What are we to *do*? What are we to *do*?"

"Now, my dear child, lie down as you promised," said Frank, with a touch of impatience, and he made way for Jessie to shake up the pillows and arrange the bedclothes.

Dick seated himself on the sofa, his legs widely apart, his hands on his knees. He glanced at Frank curiously. This must be a nasty jar to his respectability. How was he going to take it?

The sight of Mr Gore-Smythe's rather withered expression stirred Dick only to a contemptuous pity, but he was really sorry for Henrietta, who had abandoned herself so naively to the enjoyment of her virtue and prosperity.

Frank was savage, and all the more because he felt it incumbent on him to put a good face on it. He stood with his back to the fire, waiting till Henrietta was settled, trying to arrange his attitude of mind. The occasion called for generosity on his part. Of course, he had known that this sort of thing might happen, for Henrietta's affair was so deplorably recent; he had been generous in marrying her, and he must be prepared to maintain his magnanimity.

Jessie seated herself on an upright chair by the bedside. It was beginning to get dark; through the windows the grey sky was becoming a heavier grey, and in the room the firelight was throwing a pale glow on the walls that merged into pale, wavering shadows.

Henrietta lay back on her big white pillows, her eyes wide open and unhappy, her cheeks flushed, and her lips tremulous.

"Of course we must leave here," she said.

There was a dead silence. They were all agreed about that. They must leave Stotburne.

"And I felt so safe," said Henrietta, with a sob. "I shall never feel safe again."

"Why, I don't think you need go to that extreme," said Dick. "It's pure chance. Such a thing as this may never happen again. Besides every year that passes makes it less likely to occur."

"Yes, that's true, isn't it?" she cried eagerly.

"O Dick, what a comfort you are! Some day I shall be as safe as Frank is."

She spoke from an instinct of self-preservation. She did not doubt her husband. Oh no! But she felt guilty towards him, because the danger was threatening *her*, and also it was more comfortable to remind herself and the others that he might equally well have been in her predicament.

Frank was hurt, but he said nothing. Indeed,

there was nothing to say. A painful and disagreeable affair had unavoidably been reopened, and the only reasonable, right-minded thing to be done was to deal with it as expeditiously as possible. It was certainly unnecessary for Henrietta to refer to his past follies, but allowances must be made for her under the very trying circumstances. Of course, there was no comparison between the magnitude of her affair and his, but naturally he was above pointing that out to her. If Dick and Jessie had not been there, he might gently have reproached her for not trusting to his generosity; as it was, he said nothing.

"Where shall we go?" wailed Henrietta. "And we have been so happy. I had thought so much of how baby would grow up here, and—oh, my little darling! I did want her to have a happy childhood."

"My dear Henrietta," said Jessie, "of course this is a very nice place, but there is no reason why she should not grow up quite happily somewhere else."

"But *where*?" reiterated Henrietta. "And we have made so many friends here. Now we shall have to begin all over again."

"We can't begin house-hunting to-night," said Jessie, "but no doubt there are plenty to be had."

Frank turned to Dick.

"How about that house of Mrs Bellingham's," he said, "that might do for us. In Hertfordshire, I think you said?"

They all looked at him as he spoke.

"And we could go there as friends of yours," continued Frank reflectively. "That would be a sort of introduction."

Dick was taken aback; instinctively he looked towards Jessie to see what she thought of this confounded cheek, and he met her questioning eyes with a sense of comradeship.

But Henrietta was watching him eagerly.

"O Dick, is there any objection? What sort of a house is it? Isn't it nice?"

"Why, the house is rig' 'enough," he said slowly.

"Is it the place? Why are you so doubtful? Is it ugly or unhealthy?" asked Mrs Gore-Smythe.

"No, there is nothing against the place," said Goulburn. "God bless my soul, no!" and he began to laugh. He stared down at the floor, rubbing his hands between his knees, and shook with laughter.

"But are the people nice?" persisted Henrietta fretfully; "because that will matter so much when Amaryllis begins to grow up."

"But there are other difficulties besides the house," said Jessie; "you can't suddenly go away from here for no apparent reason."

"Oh, Jessie dear, don't be stupid!" cried Henrietta impatiently. "Of course we shall find a reason."

"We must say we have lost money," said Frank with decision. "That is sufficient explanation for everything, and will enable us to dismiss the servants without raising inconvenient questions."

"We can even make it the truth," said Dick gravely, "if the lie troubles you."

"My dear fellow, this is hardly a time for joking," said Frank acidly.

Henrietta turned her face sideways upon the pillow and began to cry again.

"How am I to face them all and pack up and say good-bye and everything?" she sobbed. "O Jessie, you won't go to-morrow?"

"No, dearest, I won't go," said Miss Prout. "I'll telegraph to them that you are not quite so well, which is quite true."

Jessie was full of compassion, but she had regained her own strength of mind. She had risen out of her perplexed subjection to their prosperity, and once

more she was mistress of herself and her own opinions. She discerned in Frank a shadow of the sheepish swagger she remembered so well, and she had a certain sedate pleasure in rediscovering herself superior to him.

"Miss Prout," said Dick, "won't you tell us what in your opinion would be the wisest course to pursue?"

Jessie considered before replying.

"I think the best thing to do would be for Frank to take Henrietta away for change of air as soon as practicable," she said. "The day after to-morrow, perhaps. Then while they are away, Henrietta can write to Mrs Marriot and Mrs Conybeare, and any one else she thinks necessary, to tell them of the— the loss of money, and that the house must be given up. Then Frank and I could come back to pack up. *Where* to go can easily be settled later."

"By the way," asked Dick, "how about the lease here? Do you hold it from the Marriots?"

"No," said Frank; "this house belongs to a lawyer at Camberly who bought it some twenty years ago. I suppose we shall have to sub-let."

Jessie rose.

"Now I'm going to send nurse to you, Henrietta," she said.

Dick also got up. It was quite dark now except for the firelight, and the room was full of black shadows. The foot of the bed was softly white in the glow, but Henrietta's face was lost in the darkness.

Dick took her hand and was struck with pity as he felt how hot and dry it was.

"Don't let this distress you," he said gently. "I expect it will turn out all right."

"You will write to Mrs Bellingham?" she asked wistfully. "It would be such a relief."

"Well, I daresay it will come to that," he said drily.

CHAPTER XXIII

FRANK retired to the library and shut the door. Jessie slipped away to the nursery, and Dick Goulburn went downstairs to the drawing-room.

During the next hour none of these three met.

The dressing-bell rang at seven o'clock, and Jessie, sitting over the nursery fire, waited till she had heard Frank pass along the passage to his room. As soon as his door had shut she too rose and went into the passage. On the square landing at the top of the stairs she met Dick; they both stood still just under the suspended lamp, which cast a round, unstable shadow on the carpet.

"I have been writing to Mrs Bellingham," he said.

"You have?" exclaimed Jessie.

He stuffed his fists into his pockets.

"*You* see the objection then?" he remarked, with a twinkle in his eye. "But, Miss Prout, there is the child to consider, and, hang it all, one must do the best for her."

"I know," said Jessie, feeling unhappy; "but think of Mrs Bellingham's friends! They will all call on them."

"It will be much the same as has happened here," he said.

She hesitated. Then she glanced up at him.

"They will be accepted as friends of yours," she said. "You heard what Frank said?"

"Miss Prout, all you say is most true," he replied, "but on thinking it over, I have come to the con-

clusion that I am hopelessly involved in their proceedings. You see, again, there's the child."

"Yes, I know," said Jessie.

"This is quite like old times at Sandgate," he remarked, pulling his chin.

She gave a little laugh, but became grave again immediately.

"I suppose this kind of thing will always be liable to happen," she said.

"She won't be safe for some years at least," he replied. "Presently her appearance will change, and also the general public will forget, unless something occurs to remind them."

"It's extraordinary," said Jessie. "Somehow they made me forget that there was any danger of this being found out. I believe I was as much surprised as Henrietta this afternoon." She paused, and then looked up in his face. "I can't help it," she cried impetuously; "I can't feel that it is right for them to be prosperous. I don't believe we ought to help them to impose on people. Before—at Sandgate it did not seem wrong, but now that I know what it is like, now that I have seen them here, I am sure it is not right. But I do understand what Frank means when he says they ought not to tell, and he did make me agree with him, or at least he made me quite uncertain of how to judge, and I still am uncertain. I really *don't know* whether they ought to tell or not. It is deceitful to say nothing! You can't get out of that! It *is* deceitful! But it does seem as if concealment gave them a better chance of leading good lives now. Anyway, I don't know. I can't judge. I say nothing about that. But *why* don't they live in retirement? Why do they behave as if nothing had happened? It has happened, and nothing can alter it. They needn't proclaim it to all the world, but they ought to live as if they were

different from other people. They ought to repent. They don't repent; they make a point of forgetting. Their whole life is a falsehood, and a lie of that sort is so far-reaching. I am involved, you are involved, and now Amaryllis will be involved. When I am with Henrietta, somehow she makes me see things from her point of view. She and Frank both impose on me, and I can't stand firm against them—at least I have not hitherto. I do see that once they had started upon this sort of life it was almost impossible for them to draw back. The lie became stronger than they were, and forced them to go on. But now that this has happened there is no need for them to do it again, and I am sure we ought not to help them. I am sure we ought to hold back. It's not that I am not sorry"—her voice shook—"indeed I can't bear to—to see Henrietta so—so unhappy, but——"

She stopped and half turned her face away. Dick regarded her with grave concern.

"Miss Prout," he said, "again all you say is most true, most just. But again I must reply that I at least have no right to draw back. Miss Amaryllis is a complication that cannot be lightly dismissed."

Jessie fumbled for her handkerchief and quietly dabbed her eyes and nose.

"No," she said despondently, "I see that." But suddenly she swung round towards him, and cried: "But *she* must know some day. How is she to be spared that? Let her be brought up to know it from the beginning. It seems that innocent people must suffer. My father and mother will never recover. Amaryllis cannot escape. She cannot escape any more than I have. Poor child! Poor little darling!" Again she broke off, because she was nearly weeping.

Dick looked much perturbed; he raised his eyebrows, wrinkling his forehead, and stuck out his under lip.

Then an idea occurred to him.

"Anyhow, it wouldn't bother her much if you told her now," he remarked.

Jessie laughed tremulously, and her laughter unnerved her. The tears that had been so near all the evening overflowed and ran down her cheeks. She moved to go away, pressing her handkerchief to her lips and struggling to control herself, but Dick caught hold of her free hand.

"Madam! Miss Prout! One moment, I beg."

She was startled, and tried to take away her hand.

"We shall be late for dinner," she protested in a choked voice.

"God bless my soul! I only want to ask you a question," he exclaimed indignantly. "There's time for that."

"Is there?" she murmured.

"Madam," he said gently, "will you be my wife?"

Again she tried to pull away her hand.

"Oh, I don't think so!" she said hurriedly.

"Miss Prout," he said, tightening his grasp upon her hand, "will you be my wife?"

"I—I don't know," she said, shrinking.

"Jessie," he insisted, and he felt her fingers quiver, "Jessie, will you marry me?"

This time she said nothing, but she no longer resisted him. Her heart was beating too fast for her to know what she felt. His words seemed to reach her ears with an actual touch.

He lifted her hand to his lips, and with a strange sort of passive, timid surprise, she watched him kiss it.

At that moment they heard Frank approaching along the passage. He appeared just as they separated.

"Why, Jessie! Why, Dick!" he exclaimed in a slightly displeased tone of voice. "My dear people, are you aware that it only wants a minute to the half-hour?"

PART II

CHAPTER I

MR and MRS GORE-SMYTHE took a lease of Mrs Bellingham's house when they left Stotburne, and Amaryllis was brought up in the little Hertfordshire village of Hadbury.

"The Limes" was a square, old-fashioned house. The façade, surmounted by a narrow stone coping, rose in front of the lower edge of the weather-stained tiled roof, in a screen as high as the sills of a row of dormer windows. A massive stack of chimneys stood at each end of the roof, and across the front of the house were two rows of large sash windows with white wood-work, the bottom row divided in half by the door. The porch, supported by two slender pillars, was also white, and was ornamented by a small neat indentation. Six pollarded limes stood in front of the house within white railings, sheltering it discreetly from the high road. The garden lay at the back, enclosed by a high brick wall.

"The Limes" stood on the way between Wrottle and Hadbury, the one a small town, and the other a village, but both consisting of a strip of the high road along which the buildings had become consecutive. A few big houses stood in their grounds in the surrounding district.

The character of the country was one of quietness and intimacy. Lanes and footpaths led across open meadows or under the light shade of sparse woodland.

The big roads were planted with lines of stately oaks or elms, the branches meeting far overhead. Sometimes between the great trunks lay the prospect of a tranquil, misty landscape vanishing into an infinite distance: sometimes the way passed beside some little copse of slim trees and delicate undergrowth. It was a country of wide spaces and luxuriant detail. There was nothing savage, nothing sombre, nothing overwhelming, and yet nothing trivial in its aspect.

As soon as they had moved into new surroundings both Henrietta and Frank had recovered their assurance, and they again acquired a sense of security which this time appeared to be well-founded. As Jessie had foreseen, Mrs Bellingham's friends called on them, and the Gore-Smythes were accepted at Hadbury much as they had been at Stotburne.

For the first few years of their life at Hadbury Henrietta was much occupied in being the devoted young mother. The nursery was her pride, with gay chromolithographs on the walls, a high fender, a rocking-horse and a doll's-house. Amaryllis's first vivid memories were of this room in winter time: of games with her dolls behind the thick red window-curtains, the rain streaming down the panes, and dripping in translucent drops from the moist black branches of the limes; of coming in from the daily walk on cold, cloudy afternoons to tea at the big square table; of lying in her cot staring at the fine, close bars of the fender, the red glow of the fire, and the leaping shadows on the ceiling.

Henrietta did not approve of children being too much with their parents. It was not good for the child, and was a grave interruption to the occupations of the parents. So Amaryllis came down to the drawing-room only after tea, a privilege that was withdrawn if she were naughty. Mrs Gore-Smythe, however, used to pay constant visits to the nursery, looking in when she passed the door, fair, smiling and gay,

to kiss her little girl, or exchange a few words with the nurse.

While still quite little, Amaryllis was unusually pretty. Her little round face was rather serious. Her mouth, the clear, clean red of baby lips, was firm, and her nose, even then, was a distinct feature, which distinctly turned up. She had hazel-green eyes, marked eyebrows and straight brown hair just reaching to her shoulders. People admired her, but they doubted her future prettiness: children with such well-defined features at so early an age hardly ever grew up good-looking, they said, and Amaryllis fulfilled their expectations. At twelve years old she was a slim, active child, with eyes that were both eager and grave, straight hair that was apt to divide into strands, high cheek-bones, a slightly tilted nose, and a wide mouth. She had a certain distinction, but, as Henrietta mournfully acknowledged, she was plain.

Till she was seven years old she was ruled by a superior nurse, who bustled about in a crisp white cotton gown, and stood no nonsense, a phrase that Amaryllis ever after associated with hard knuckles and a firm grasp.

The nurse was replaced by a middle-aged nursery governess, faded in appearance and character, who drew morals from daily occurrences, and taught Amaryllis the Catechism, the Guide to Knowledge, and the elements of English history. She, too, stayed until Henrietta considered that Amaryllis required more experienced teaching, and then in her turn she was succeeded by a young woman who had taken her degree.

Miss Stirling was fresh-looking and capable. She had an indefinable air of thoroughness in her aspect and manner. She moved with decision: she spoke fluently and connectedly: she took an intelligent interest in all those things of which she had not made a special study: she was able to understand anything

that was explained to her. She believed in the value of method, and arranged the day with a precision that disposed of every minute. She called leisure recreation, and expected Amaryllis to use it hygienically.

Both Frank and Henrietta were satisfied that she was just the person required. They wished that Amaryllis should have a really good education, but neither of them liked the idea of sending her to school, where she would necessarily have to mix with all sorts of girls. Miss Stirling, who had had both school and college training, was an obvious solution of the difficulty.

As Amaryllis had gradually ceased to be a baby, Henrietta's affection for her settled down into a steady habit. The excitement of her feeling subsided, and though anything that had broken the habit would have caused her poignant grief, her love for her daughter was no longer the surprised consciousness of each day. Indeed, as Amaryllis grew older, she became aware of a vague feeling of disappointment. The child was not developing into the daughter she had dreamed of, and she was puzzled and surprised to perceive how small a result was achieved by her efforts to shape Amaryllis's character. She felt much as if she were modelling a figure in clay which, as it grew under her hands, asserted itself, and became something that she had never intended. However, Amaryllis might improve. As long as a girl was in her teens, there was always likelihood of change both moral and physical, and at least, poor darling, she was an affectionate little girl. It was not that Henrietta expected her to be perfect: that, of course, would be absurd. But Mrs Gore-Smythe, looking back on her girlhood, felt that her own indocility had been picturesque and interesting, while Amaryllis's naughtiness was simply commonplace. Why, for instance, should she object to playing tennis in the afternoons with Miss Stirling? It was a very good

game, and she *ought* to be able to play well ; it would mean many pleasant parties for her later on. Besides, it was good for her to run about. And it was not as if Miss Stirling were dull or elderly. On the contrary, she was little more than a girl herself. She was so sensible, too. Henrietta quite agreed with her when she said a girl ought not to have leisure hours to dispose of at her will, as that would encourage idleness, and undermine a sense of the value of time.

Then Henrietta was disturbed to see that Amaryllis was unbalanced. At times she had moods of wild gaiety, but more often she displayed an unusual capacity for silence. Her temper, too, was variable in much the same way, showing itself upon rare occasions in gusts of passion, but often in what Henrietta regretted to have to call sulkiness.

To be sure, the period of growing up was apt to be difficult, and Henrietta assured Frank that the child would probably be much easier to deal with when she had definitely "come out." Still, in her heart she marvelled that this daughter should be so unlike herself, and so unlike Frank, too.

At about this time Henrietta was still pretty, and looked many years younger than her real age. Though she had lost her extreme slimness, she had only acquired the amount of plumpness that is comely. Her fair hair was abundant, her eyes rather less prominent, while her clear white skin was still almost smooth : only a few fine lines showed at the corners of her eyes.

Her life was pleasant and even, in its course, perhaps almost too even. And yet, no ; for, after all, she *had* a past, and the drama of her past was sufficient to give her a sense of romance, and of being different to other people, for all time. She was the same Henrietta who had been tried for murder, the same Henrietta who had committed desperate deeds.

At first she had been thankful for anything that

helped her to forget, that helped to make the past seem unreal, and she had occasionally suffered an anguish of apprehension lest she should be recognised, which in itself was an event. But as the years slipped by, and her comfortable, commonplace existence became more secure, she began to find the same pleasure in recalling all that had happened that she might feel in reading an exciting novel, but with the added interest that she herself was the central figure, and that the story was true. The very horror of it, now that it lay so far behind her, caused her a sort of morbid gratification, and she would even work herself up into a semblance of fear of discovery, just to bring home to herself that she was still the same heroine, and something quite distinct from the common herd. At long intervals her conscience disturbed her, but she had evolved the conviction that she had suffered enough to atone, and she overcame her uneasiness without difficulty.

Henrietta took to reading sensational novels in the privacy of her own boudoir, principally those dealing with murder, and she compared the heroines with herself with an almost passionate curiosity. Also she never missed reading the criminal reports in the paper; but she was careful not to allude to anything that she read of this sort, and she kept a pretty brocade cover to conceal the backs of the novels. In old days she would not have been so careful, but though she was still apt to speak without thinking, she had acquired under Frank's influence an instinct for reticence on certain points.

Frank published the first volume of his book in 1893; it was noticed in several lengthy reviews, and was bought as an authoritative work by libraries. He felt that the publication of the volume was of very real moment, in more than one way. Not only was it a work of minute knowledge, but it set a seal upon the solid worth of his character: it confirmed

his opinion of himself beyond all doubt. It was necessary to his dignity that he should take his value for granted. He disliked thinking about himself: he preferred to rest assured of his indisputable merits, and to act without misgiving or hesitation.

He had changed in appearance rather more than Henrietta. He had acquired the aspect of a student, and a worn, benign look had developed upon his countenance. Heavy lines crossed his forehead, and his brows seemed to have grown forward over his eyes, as if heavy with thought. His hair was grey, though his moustache was still dark; his cheeks were flat, and he stooped slightly. Had he thought about it he would have been troubled at the fact of increasing age, but age and death were questions that, according to his code, were never contemplated, while to refer to such things in speech was a gross error in taste.

His attitude towards Amaryllis was benevolent. She was his daughter, and so ought to require as little explanation as himself. Anything that called for criticism in her displeased him seriously, and consequently he was rather a stern father; but as long as she was docile, as long as she kissed him morning and evening, as long as she answered intelligently when he spoke to her, he was quite satisfied. Of course he loved her; she was his daughter, and naturally his affection for her could not be questioned.

Jessie, however, did question it. Her dislike of Frank persisted through the passing years. Neither the general opinion of his excellence, nor the publication of his book, not even his valuation of himself could overcome her distrust of him. Never again was she dominated by him as she had been during those few weeks at Stotburne.

Her relations with Henrietta had become simpler and more tranquil. She was fond of her as she had always been, but she no longer took all that concerned

her sister to heart. Her own life had become too full of happiness and cares for that to be possible.

Jessie and Dick had married shortly after the house at Stotburne had been given up, and by the time Amaryllys was twelve, two boys and two girls had been born to them. Occasionally Henrietta and Amaryllys went to stay at Boltons, but more often the Goulburns came to Hadbury, and Henrietta was constantly urging her sister to let their house and take one nearer to "The Limes." For obvious reasons Frank could not return to his old home, and this constituted the single blemish to general appearances.

Old Mr Prout died about a year after Jessie's first son was born, and Mrs Prout went to live with the Goulburns. This led to a meeting between her and Henrietta, and Mrs Gore-Smythe re-established ordinary relations between them by her complete disregard of the existence of anything else. Face to face with Henrietta, Mrs Prout could not maintain her attitude of stern disapprobation, simply because she could not keep in mind that there was anything but the merest trivialities to disapprove of. Also she loved Amaryllys. The rigour with which she had brought up her own children disappeared when it was a question of Amaryllys. A close friendship grew up between the little girl and her grandmother, and Mrs Prout not only indulged her, and excused her, but she and Amaryllys spent many hours in playing long, serious games together. As the little girl grew up, the friendship became if anything stronger, and Mrs Prout gradually came to spend half her time with Henrietta in order to be near her grandchild. Much to Dick's amusement the old lady disapproved in turn of all three of the authorities who were placed over Amaryllys, but most of all did she dislike Miss Stirling.

"A most un-repossessing young woman," she remarked on one occasion when she and the Goul-

burns were staying at Hadbury. "Fortunately, Molly has sense enough not to like her."

"I wish you wouldn't call her Molly, mother," said Henrietta. "I don't like nick-names. And really Miss Stirling has proved most satisfactory. Frank was noticing only the other day how much Amaryllis has improved."

"Which only means that the child is growing up," said Mrs Prout abruptly.

"Well, and even so," said Henrietta, "Miss Stirling is showing her how to grow up. Surely that is the meaning of education."

"Perhaps she is showing her how *not* to grow up," said Dick, "which is even more instructive."

"The one includes the other," remarked Frank blandly, "and I must say I have been glad to see that Amaryllis has acquired more stability lately, which I attribute very much to Miss Stirling's influence."

"Amaryllis is very quiet," remarked Jessie, and Henrietta sighed heavily.

"She is not quiet with me," said Mrs Prout with decision; "you wait and see. She's at an age when she is neither child nor woman. Presently, when she herself has found out *what* she is, she will astonish you all."

"Not too much, I hope," said Frank, with an air of humour.

They all laughed, and shortly after, when Jessie was alone with Dick, she said:

"I really believe mother knows more about Amaryllis than any of us. I must own I don't quite know what to make of her, but I feel sure they don't treat her wisely. They don't understand her, and they think they do."

"Well, Mrs Jessie, what are you going to do about it?" enquired Dick.

"Why, nothing, I suppose," said Jessie, with a sigh.

"There isn't anything to be done."

CHAPTER II

MISS STIRLING left in the summer of Amaryllis's eighteenth year, and Henrietta was brought into really intimate contact with her daughter for the first time since she had been a baby. During the intervening period of governesses their intercourse had maintained, in a small way, a character of ceremony, partly because it was supposed to supply on occasion the extremes of pleasure and punishment, partly because neither Henrietta nor Frank had much real sympathy with a half-grown girl; they had been satisfied that Amaryllis should be subdued in their presence, feeling assured that as soon as she emerged from the school-room a new footing of intimacy could be established.

At eighteen Amaryllis was slim and active, rather small, with straight brown hair, which she parted in the middle and twisted into a knot at the back; it was very thick, and heavy strands of it curved forward, shading each side of her forehead. She had thick eyebrows, warm, clear colouring, healthily ruddy, and a slightly turned-up nose; her wide mouth in repose was almost tragic, but the look in her hazel eyes was alert with a vitality that in itself suggested lightheartedness. Her face was very small, with high cheek-bones, and a delicate, square jaw.

Amaryllis had received much thorough instruction. She had been taught the opinions of competent authorities upon most subjects, but she had never been encouraged to think for herself. Miss Stirling

drew no distinction between understanding other people's ideas and forming an original opinion, and had Amaryllis liked her governess, her mind would have been, as it were, swaddled with information and incapable of independent movement. However, a quiet unresentful but persistent antagonism to Miss Stirling's influence kept her brain active with dissatisfaction.

Miss Stirling had not found her a gratifying pupil on the whole. Amaryllis had ability, to be sure, but she certainly did not know how to make the most of her powers. If she were not interested in a subject she would become more and more subdued and passive, fixing her eyes upon Miss Stirling's face with a look of protest that was almost ludicrous, while on the other hand, if her interest were roused, it was absolutely disconcerting. And, indeed, her interest was so unregulated, so unaccountable, so perverse, that one hardly knew how to deal with it! She would become absorbed in something quite irrelevant, and pursue it regardless of time, place, or admonition. After all, a certain mental economy was essential, and a strict attention to method was the only way to train the mind and acquire knowledge. Moreover, Miss Stirling could not help suspecting that an interest so vehement could scarcely be altogether genuine, and even if it were, she equally could not help thinking that it was not quite conscientious to lose sight of everything else in the occupation of the moment.

Henrietta was not much exercised by this trait in her daughter. Of course, Miss Stirling would attribute importance to it because—well, it was her business to; but that sort of capriciousness would no longer exist when Amaryllis was free from school-room discipline. What did somewhat trouble Mrs Gore-Smythe was that Amaryllis was disposed to assert herself in the

choice of her friends. While still a child, other children, carefully selected, had been invited from time to time to have tea with her, and she also at intervals had returned their visits. Thus by force of growing up together in the same place, a sort of intimacy was established between her and the Carmichael girls from Hunstonbury Court, with Edith Staunton from Broxton House, and Dr Crewe's two daughters. Amaryllis, however, only cared for them as custom leads one to care, and her real friendship was given to Joan Lloyd, one of the daughters of the organist at the little Catholic church.

Henrietta did not approve of the Lloyds, and she always regretted her cordiality to them on their first acquaintance. Their household was *tertium quid* of the *harum-scarum*. Of course, it was difficult to bring up daughters on a very small income, but the excuse did not make the result any less pleasing, and Mrs Gore-Smythe did not think the Lloyds good companions for her daughter. It was not that Henrietta disapproved of intellectual women. Certainly not. Had she not thoroughly liked Miss Stirling, who had taken a First, and was really a learned woman. But there was something about Joan Lloyd which made it impossible to overlook her, and it was this indefinable quality that awoke distrust in Henrietta. Perhaps Philippa had it more than Joan, but Philippa was older than Amaryllis, whereas Joan was about her age.

However, Henrietta was not seriously uneasy. She had great confidence in her own influence upon her daughter now that Amaryllis would be brought into everyday homely intimacy with her. Upon the whole, it was time that Miss Stirling left. She had done her part, and done it very well, but the moment had come that called especially for maternal care and guidance.

As a matter of fact, Amaryllis was an unknown quantity both to her parents and to herself. She

herself scarcely realised how much in opposition she was to her surroundings, nor did she attribute any importance to her moments of self-assertion. When pressure was put on her to do something she did not like, she tried frankly to get her own way, but hitherto she had taken it for granted that those in authority over her were right. The dryness of her education had kept much of her nature dormant, and at the moment of her newly-acquired liberty, her self-consciousness was even too much restrained.

As they sat at dessert on the evening of Miss Stirling's departure, Henrietta smiled across the table to Frank.

"This is an important occasion, father," she said. "Do you realise that our little girl is grown up?"

Mrs Gore-Smythe was wearing a pale grey tea-gown, with white lace elbow sleeves. She was resting her slim wrist on the table, as she fingered the stem of her wine-glass. Her fair hair was done as only a maid can do it, with a firmness and elaboration of wave and twist that no accident could disorder. It was done close to her head, and the fair, delicate tendrils on her forehead and behind her ears were admirably becoming to her pale face.

Behind Frank the French windows stood open: the curtains had not been drawn, and the clear, hazy pallor of the sky was deepening into blue, while here and there a star showed with the sharpness of a minute spark. The room was dim with the fading twilight, but the oval table was bright with the light of four candles under pink shades. A low bowl of roses stood in the centre surrounded by little silver filigree plates of bonbons, and a dish half full of strawberries stood in front of Mrs Gore-Smythe.

Frank turned a benevolent glance upon Amaryllis, who in a high, soft, white silk blouse and skirt was sitting between him and her mother.

"Why, truly, this is a great occasion!" he said. "At what psychological moment did the transformation take place? Did you mark the change? Exactly how much have you gained in importance since three o'clock this afternoon?"

Amaryllis half smiled, and shook her head.

"I don't feel different at all," she said.

"That will come, darling," said Henrietta, "and quite soon. To-morrow, when you put on your new frock for the garden party—that will be a great step. And I think we must make a change in the way you do your hair, Amaryllis. Ask Bartlett to give you some hair-wavers to-night. It would be a great improvement if your hair were not so straight."

"You think, then," said Amaryllis, half mischievously, half timidly, "that I had better begin with the outside? If I make myself look different I shall feel different?"

"Silly child!" said Henrietta kindly.

"Aha! you may laugh," said Frank, "but a profound moral truth underlies that remark. Up to a certain point fine feathers do make fine birds, and certainly slovenly attire and habits do tend to make a slovenly mind. Much may be done to advance civilisation by giving people a standard of appearances."

Amaryllis was amused at the thought of a transformation proceeding from without, inward. It was certainly partly true; she knew what a difference a tidy frock made to her point of view. But—but—she felt that for some reason she was antagonistic to that way of changing; she felt that any such transformation, by its very action, limited development. She had a sudden vision of a pudding that was expected to rise to fill the turrets and flutings of the pudding-mould, but could not overflow without breaking it. However, she said nothing; she was

afraid of speaking freely before her father. As she sat there in silence her ideas flitted about the change that growing up would make to her. The probability of becoming different was exceedingly interesting. The future suddenly appeared to her pregnant with undefined possibilities, and she realised with a new excitement that the world was wide, that multitudes were living, that anything might happen, that Life was Life.

"And what are you going to do with your leisure, may I ask?" enquired Frank benignly. "Not spend it all on frivolity, I hope?"

"Oh, Miss Stirling has taught her the value of some definite occupation too well for there to be any danger of that," said Henrietta, smiling. "I'm not afraid of her becoming too frivolous."

Frank leant back in his chair and put his thumbs into the sleeve-holes of his waistcoat, an attitude he only indulged in when in a condescending humour.

"Why, of course, contact with one's kind is as much a part of education as anything else," he said. "But I think you ought to set aside a certain part of the day for serious and connected reading. Perhaps, later on, you might even learn to help me with the arrangement and copying of extracts for the history. . . . However, that we can see later on. What I was going to say was, that you may help yourself to books out of the study, if you will always be careful to put them back."

Amaryllis raised her eyes with a sudden alert interest.

"May I really?" she said.

He smiled at her.

"There are advantages in growing up, you see," he said. "Come down to me there to-morrow morning and we will talk over together a course of reading."

Amaryllis dropped her eyelids. She was very

much occupied in pressing a strawberry stalk and calyx into the sifted sugar on her plate, and twirling it round, scattering the sugar in a little circular cloud. A course of reading sounded no more attractive to her than the lessons she hoped to have left behind her, and the prospect a little detracted from the privilege of taking books for herself from the shelves in the study. She was both flattered and depressed by his offer of advice. He usually took so little notice of her, that this, too, gave her a sense of her new dignity. And yet she would rather, oh, so much rather. . . . That was to say, she felt that he required so high a standard of intelligence.

That evening when she went up to bed she was careful to ask her mother's maid for the hair-wavers, but she refused Bartlett's offer to twist them into her hair for her. She slipped off her frock, put on her pink cotton dressing-gown, and sat down in front of the dressing-table. But she let her hands rest on her lap, and she stared at the reflection in the glass of her small, serious countenance under the eaves of thick brown hair. The light of the two candles on each side of the looking-glass shone on her face, and the reflection gazed back at her clear and living out of the dusky, indistinct background.

Hitherto she had not paid much attention to her appearance, taking it rather for granted that she was she, and looked as she did. But now the prospect of curling her hair roused her interest. She wondered how much difference it would make, and she thought with some excitement of her new hat and gown, and the garden-party. Then it flashed into her mind that Miss Stirling had really gone, and she could not help feeling glad. Just at the moment she had been sorry to say good-bye, but that was all. It was no use pretending. She was a little depressed by the

thought of her own hard-heartedness, especially as her father and mother had liked Miss Stirling so much. The next moment, however, she remembered that her grandmother had always disliked her. That was a great comfort. Amaryllis's lips parted in a smile, and when she saw her own smile in the glass, she laughed outright.

Her thoughts wandered.

How delightful it would be to take whatever book she wanted from the study; and her father really *had* given her permission. She had not expected that! To-morrow morning she would go round and tell Joan Lloyd. Her mind's eye suddenly saw the rows of books completely covering two walls of the study. She recollected the covers of certain books she had hankered after! She rose to her feet. Why not go now and get one? Why wait till the morning?

She took up her flat candlestick and then paused. Would her father be there? She did not want to meet him. Probably he was still in the drawing-room, where they had left him dozing over his book when she and her mother had come up to bed.

Would he object? But why should he? He had given her permission, and surely he did not mean that she was not to read any but the books he recommended? No, but she felt he might disapprove of her impatience, that he would be annoyed by her silliness in wanting to read that night, if only for five minutes, instead of waiting till the morning.

"Anyway, I'm not going to wait," she thought, with a feeling of inward laughter and exhilaration.

She opened her door; the silence of the house seemed to be intensified by the darkness. She went quickly and lightly downstairs; the lamp was still burning in the hall. As she passed the drawing-room door on the ground floor she perceived light through the chinks. So her father was still there!

She slipped along the passage leading from the hall to the study, opened the door and went in. The windows had been bolted and shuttered for the night, and the room felt stuffy. The light of her candle was weak and insufficient in the big, dark room.

Amaryllis went to the shelves nearest the door, and, holding the candle close to the books, bent down to read the titles. In the lowest shelf were dictionaries and encyclopædias. She raised the candle. On the one above were histories, and further up histories again. The library steps were on the other side of the room. She did not trouble to get them, but climbed on to a chair. A row of smallish books on the top shelf attracted her. She stood on tiptoe, and her heels rose out of her loose pink, quilted slippers. She pulled at the bottom of a volume with the tips of her fingers, her sleeve falling away from her slim arm, and her head bent back as she looked up. The book came out, but instead of falling into her hand, it fell on to the floor. The noise terrified her. She scrambled down, picked up the book, and thinking she heard some one move, she blew out her candle. The next moment she called herself absurd. Then she laughed softly. No one was coming. No one had heard her, and if they had, what would it have mattered?

"I should have to explain," thought Amaryllis, "and I don't like explaining, except to myself."

She felt her way to the door, and softly opened it. No one was moving. Hastily she slipped along the passage and upstairs to her room. She laughed again as she shut her door, and then she looked to see what book she had got.

"The Ordeal of Richard Feverel"—George Meredith.

CHAPTER III

THE next morning Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe sat down to breakfast without Amaryllis.

"What a lovely day for the garden-party!" remarked Henrietta, glancing up as she poured out her coffee, and looking through the wide-open windows into the walled garden. The fresh morning mist was dissolving into clear sunshine.

Frank was reading the *Times*, temporarily seated sideways, in order to have space to hold the extended sheets. As Henrietta spoke he folded the paper briskly, placed it on the table, and turned his attention to breakfast.

"Ha! let us see what we have here," he remarked as he lifted the lid of the silver dish in front of him. "Kedgeriee for you, my love?" Then, looking round the room: "Where's Amaryllis?"

"I haven't seen her," replied Henrietta. "She's late."

"H'm! Is this the first consequence of Miss Stirling's absence?" he said in a displeased tone. "Not a very good beginning. Er — Kedgeriee, Henrietta?"

"No thanks. I'll have an egg, I think," said Mrs Gore-Smythe. "I hope she is all right. I think I'll go up and see."

"No! Nonsense!" said Frank peremptorily. "Have your breakfast first. Or send one of the maids. But

she was all right last night—I never saw her looking better."

He was afraid that if Henrietta went to look for her daughter she might linger upstairs, and he disliked having any meal by himself. He was accustomed to his wife's company at breakfast, and he wanted some one to pour out his coffee. Also he had an instinctive aversion to recognising any possible reason for anxiety. He preferred rather to believe that the person who upset the established order of his day was blameworthy.

"It's not like her to be late in the morning," remarked Henrietta, cracking her egg. "Really, Richards is too tiresome. The eggs are hard-boiled again. Will you give me the butter, please?"

"Why don't you send the woman away?" said Frank. "If she can't do her work properly, get rid of her."

"Oh, my dear Frank, don't be absurd! She is an excellent cook. It's only the eggs, and I suppose the kitchenmaid does those."

"Well, send the kitchenmaid away then," grumbled Mr Gore-Smythe. "Perhaps she did the kedgeree too. It's quite cold—hardly eatable! And just look at the toast! It's like leather."

He took, however, a second helping of the kedgeree and a hot roll.

Still Amaryllis did not appear.

"Henrietta, this sort of thing won't do," said Frank severely. "You must talk to Amaryllis. It won't do at all. She must learn to be punctual. Unpunctuality is a serious fault. It's the sign of a slipshod mind. It's—it's—uncivilised, and I cannot allow *my* daughter to give way to it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Henrietta suddenly, with a little laugh, "I wonder if she is in difficulties with her hair. I told her to curl it, you know."

Frank glanced at her across the table with a quick lift of his eyebrows. As he entertained the idea, amusement expanded upon his face.

"Aha!" he said with a chuckle, "the dawn of vanity! You may be sure that's it. A momentous occasion! Who can measure how much depends on the quality of one's vanity? I think I will personally superintend its development in Amaryllis."

He was delighted with a supposition that rendered anxiety unnecessary, and would keep Henrietta at the breakfast table.

Mrs Gore-Smythe laughed again.

"Poor child, if she doesn't come soon I will send Bartlett to her."

With a smile on her face she slowly buttered a piece of toast and cut it into strips.

"To think of her being eighteen!" she said.

"No one would take you to be the mother of a grown-up daughter," said Frank, smiling at her. Instinctively he felt that her good looks were meritorious; her appearance so exactly corresponded, as did her manner, with the position he wished her to fill.

Henrietta laughed a little consciously, and then said with a sigh:

"I wish the child were better-looking."

"Oh, she's well enough," said Frank reassuringly.

"Of course, I do want her to marry young, if only the right person will turn up," said Henrietta. "It is curious," she went on, "how one settles down as one grows older."

She observed with some surprise that she was satisfied for her daughter to be the heroine of romance in her place, while her own contentment was to a great extent dependent on the material details of daily life. This made her feel virtuous.

"Jessie settled down much too soon," she commented

the next instant, "and any sort of occurrence was simply a disturbance to her."

Frank laughed with an air of superiority.

"It always amuses me to think how well fitted she and Dick are to each other," he said. "If you had searched the whole of Europe you couldn't have found any one to suit him better."

"Of course, I do think she has gone to the other extreme," said Henrietta. "I can hardly imagine that Jessie can ever be a really intimate companion to her daughters. If she had ever been capable of—well—a little romantic feeling, she would have remained more in touch with youth."

Frank handed her his cup for more coffee, and, leaning back in his chair, smiled thoughtfully. He had absolute confidence in her, that she would play up to the most decorous conception of her "part" as it changed with the changing years. It was curious that while he accepted his own attitude as sincere, he not only took it for granted that she was playing a part, but he admired her for doing so. Henrietta, on the other hand, believed both in herself and in him.

Yes, Frank felt that he had done well in marrying her. Life was very pleasant; he too had settled down, and intellectual pursuits supplied him with an interest, and—yes, gave him a certain position amongst his neighbours. And now, of course, Amaryllis, if she married well, would set a final seal upon their respectability, though really they might well feel secure now. By Jove! it was nearly eighteen years since they had come to live in Hertfordshire, and not a shadow of suspicion had come to trouble them.

"Eighteen years!" he said aloud. "We came here in the same year that Amaryllis was born."

She glanced at him a little timidly, wondering what might be the exact trend of his thoughts. He

rose and came to her, and laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder.

"All's well that ends well," he said benignly, "and it is very well with us."

Henrietta was moved; she clasped his free hand, and looked up with emotion into his face.

It was so very unusual for him to refer even remotely to the past, and his words now seemed to acknowledge a fellowship of vulnerability that he was apt to ignore.

"O Frank!" she murmured, "dear Frank!"

He kissed her forehead.

"If you come to think of it," she said, smiling, "it *has* been a triumph."

In old days she would have added "for both of us," and the phrase did occur to her, but she refrained from uttering it. She was more afraid of hurting his feelings than she used to be; also she was more confident that he needed no reminder.

"I must really go and see what that child is doing," she said the next minute, and she rose.

"Tell her I am full of expectation, and will give her the benefit of my criticism," he said jocosely.

Henrietta ran upstairs and knocked at the door of her daughter's room. As she received no answer she opened it and looked in. In spite of the daylight and bright sunshine Amaryllis was still in bed and fast asleep!

Mrs Gore-Smythe uttered a soft exclamation, and advanced into the room.

Amaryllis's small brown head was resting to one side of the pillow, her profile bent downwards to her fist, which, fast closed, was placed like a trumpet against her lips. Her hair, though gathered into a plait, was roughened, and her face was rosy. She looked like an elf napping.

As Henrietta approached the bed, Amaryllis opened her eyes, and her expression changed to one

of instantaneous surprise, alarm, and bewilderment, at waking to find her mother standing beside her, already dressed. She sat up with a cry.

"Why, mother! Why——"

"My dear child," said Henrietta, "do you know what the time is?"

Amaryllis put up her hands to her temples and pushed back her hair.

"Have I overslept myself? I'm so sorry." She looked to see if the hot-water can was in the basin, and its neat blue enamel against the white china convicted her of having slept in spite of the housemaid's entrance.

"Father and I have finished breakfast," said Henrietta, smiling, but Amaryllis looked conscience-stricken.

"I didn't hear Mary call me," she said. "How sound I must have slept!"

"What can have made you so sleepy?" exclaimed her mother, scrutinising her rather anxiously. "Did you have a bad night? Are you quite well?"

Amaryllis was sitting upright in her narrow, white-flounced bed. Her hair in a thick plait hung down her back, and in loose strands on each side of her forehead; her hands were resting, palm downwards, on the bed, a little behind her, as if she were just about to start up. Her hazel eyes met her mother's look eagerly, as she recollected the real reason of her prolonged sleep.

"Oh, I'm perfectly well," she replied hastily, crying out immediately afterwards: "Mother, *have* you read 'Richard Feverel'?"

"Have I read 'Richard Feverel'?" echoed Henrietta, not at once perceiving in what way the book was relevant.

"Yes. O mother, I began it last night, and that's why. . . . You see, I simply couldn't leave off!"

"Amaryllis, you don't mean to say that you sat up last night reading 'Richard Feverel'?"

Amaryllis nodded.

"And that is why you have overslept yourself this morning?"

She nodded again.

"Really, I never heard anything so—so childish!" cried Mrs Gore-Smythe indignantly. "I shall repent of having sent Miss Stirling away if you can't show more sense. I'm sure I don't know what your father will say! And, my *dear* child, you *haven't* curled your hair as I told you!"

A look of mingled dismay and disappointment flashed into Amaryllis's face.

"O mother, I am so sorry! I did mean to, but I quite forgot. I did ask Bartlett for the curlers—there they are on the dressing-table."

"What's the use of asking for them if you don't use them?" cried Henrietta. "I never heard anything so provoking. I did want you to look nice this afternoon. You will have to have your hair curled with the tongs."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Amaryllis humbly, "but I was so interested——"

Her penitence vanished before the recollection of what had caused her forgetfulness. Hitherto the books she had been allowed to read had been carefully selected by Miss Stirling, and any strong meat for her mind had been administered in lesson-time, strained through a web of commentaries. This was the first time that her mind had encountered a forcible book unchaperoned, and the consciousness of the quickening activity of her brain as she sat reading in the silent night, aware of the solitude, of the wide-open window, and the soft warm air, had been in itself an experience. She felt that it had been a revelation, yet she could not define what had

been revealed to her. But the world looked different to her in consequence; she had acquired a new power of perception, a new sense of vitality. It was not so much that she had learned any new thought, as that she had discovered in herself an unsuspected capacity for thinking. She felt bursting with a desire to talk to her mother, without knowing exactly what she wanted to say.

But Henrietta had no perception of her daughter's frame of mind. She was annoyed, especially about the hair. She particularly wanted the child to look nice, and it was so bad for the hair to curl it with tongs. Besides, she ought to care reasonably about her appearance.

"Upon my word——" she began, but Amaryllis interrupted her. She suddenly put her knees up under the bedclothes, making a small heap, which she clasped with her two arms, while resting her chin on its summit. She looked up at her mother with a gleam in her eyes, and found relief in the announcement:

"I am so glad Miss Stirling has gone!"

"O Amaryllis!" protested Henrietta, a little shocked.

"I am," said Amaryllis. "I suspected I was yesterday, but I know I am to-day."

"Well, in a way I am glad too," agreed Henrietta. "Of course it means that I shall have my little daughter all to myself, which will be very nice."

Amaryllis suddenly knelt up, and flung her arms round her mother's neck.

"Oh, my child!" cried Henrietta, laughing.

She sat down on the bed, and Amaryllis squatted close by her, keeping hold of her hands.

"But I liked poor Miss Stirling," said Mrs Gore-Smythe, indulgently reproachful.

"I didn't," replied Amaryllis.

"O Amaryllis," cried her mother, "I wish you wouldn't say such things!"

The girl looked thoughtful.

"You see," she explained, "I feel as if I had been the stuff in a bottle, and Miss Stirling had been the stopper. And I have been *up* for a long time, only I hadn't room to know how much *up* I was. Well, now the stopper is out, and I'm out . . . and I *am* glad she's gone! But, mother, if I didn't like her, why shouldn't I say so?"

"You ought to have liked her," said Henrietta. "She was very kind and very cultivated. Besides, it is heartless to be glad that a person has gone just because she happened to be in authority over you."

"Am I heartless?" asked Amaryllis wistfully. "But I don't think that *is* the reason that I didn't like her."

No, it was not being under authority that she had minded, but being restricted, and she felt there was a difference. The questions also flashed through her mind, whether one could acquire a feeling because of duty, whether pretending to feel it would make one really feel it, whether it was honest not to say so when one did not feel it, whether self-control was honest. But she could not stop to consider such points now; her ideas were in a hurry. Besides, she did not wish to talk about Miss Stirling any more.

"Mother, dearest," she said, "I do so want to know. What were you like when you were eighteen?"

Henrietta was always interested in talking about herself. She looked into her daughter's eager face with a bright smile.

"I expect you were awfully pretty," said Amaryllis quickly.

"I was very vain, anyway, my darling," said Henrietta, laughing. "And the fact that I cared

what I looked like always used to shock your grandfather and grandmother, and Aunt Jessie too. She was never young, you know. I was constantly in disgrace for trying to dress myself becomingly."

"And then . . . and then . . ." suggested Amaryllis, "I suppose you married . . ."

"Ah, when I married father everything was different. I was happy then for the first time in my life."

"Were you very unhappy before?"

Henrietta became indiscreet. She desired instinctively not only to be loved by her daughter, but to be of interest to her; moreover, she could not resist a sympathetic audience, but the real source of the indiscretion was the interest she herself felt in the story.

"My darling, yes," she replied; "and not only when I was at home with grandfather. My little Amaryllis doesn't know, I think, that I was married before I met father."

Amaryllis gasped.

"O mother, *were* you?"

"Unfortunately, yes, darling," said Henrietta. "Of course, it is better not to talk of these things, but I can trust my little girl not to chatter, can't I? Yes; I was married when I was very little older than you are."

"And he — wasn't he nice?" asked Amaryllis, much thrilled.

"No, darling," said Henrietta softly, "he was not nice. But I didn't know that when I married him. I was never in love with him, darling, but I thought he was kind—he was a great deal older than I was—and I was very unhappy at home. Then *they* all wanted it—it was the only time they ever praised me! And then when it was too late I found that I had made a dreadful mistake."

"Did you—did you run away?" asked Amaryllis in a whisper, thinking of Lady Feverel.

"Oh, my child, no!" cried Henrietta, shocked.

"But oh, mother—if he was unkind——"

"Ah, Amaryllis, you will understand better when you are older," said Mrs Gore-Smythe. "A woman who leaves her husband is never really forgiven by the world. She is always considered the one to blame. Why! if it is known that she is not happy in her married life, that too is counted against her, even if she offends no social laws."

"But that's unjust!" cried Amaryllis, with energy, "horribly unjust!"

"In a way it is," said Henrietta, "or rather it is hard upon women, but I think it all works for the best." She felt vaguely that if the world were more just half the existing romances would never happen, which would be regrettable. Besides it gave her an exalted opinion of herself as a woman, to feel her virtue protected by social laws so harsh that she became a victim.

"Did he die then?" asked Amaryllis.

Henrietta felt a little dizzy, though she was prepared for the question.

"Yes, darling," she said.

"Weren't you glad?" said Amaryllis, with fervour.

For a moment Mrs Gore-Smythe was taken aback, but the next instant she perceived that the question really had nothing to do with the part she had taken in her husband's death. The point raised was a real problem. She hesitated, being anxious to answer accurately.

"My feelings were mixed," she said. "Death is terrible when you see it, and even if you have disliked the person who is dead, you can't feel exactly glad. And then it is so difficult to realise that some one you are accustomed to has gone for ever. Of course, it

did mean freedom to me, but even the freedom I had wanted seemed dreary to me when I first got it."

Yes, looking back to the time of his death, this was exactly what she had felt. She was conscious of having given a true description. However, she was disinclined to answer any more such questions for the moment, and she rose briskly, saying:

"Well, I mustn't stay here all day. And you must get up. But you had better have your breakfast first. I will tell Mary to bring it up to you."

"I'm awfully hungry," said Amaryllis.

CHAPTER IV

AMARYLLIS first met Kenneth Rodwell at the Lloyds' house about a week later.

The weather had changed, and the afternoon was wet and still, with grave skies. She slipped out of the house immediately after lunch and walked briskly in the direction of the village. The road was shining and grey with the wet ; here and there opaque water filled the ruts and puddles. The fences showed in dark, glistening lines amongst the sodden leaves of the hedgerows, and the drip from the occasional trees by the roadside fell on to her umbrella as she passed with a sudden loud, quick pattering. The air was full of moisture, and fine drops settled on the hairs of her tweed ulster and cap.

Amaryllis's first involuntary feeling on leaving the house had been relief that neither her father nor her mother had seen her go ; at least they had not called her back to ask her where she was going, nor why she was going out in the wet, nor to suggest some other way of spending the afternoon. But this feeling, so far as it concerned her parents, was momentary, and it resolved into a more defined satisfaction that the afternoon was wet. They had been engaged to drive over to Deane Court for a tennis-party. Of course, it would probably have been fun, but on the whole she was glad not to go. There had been some sort of party every day during the past week : lunch with the Cunninghams yesterday, and the day before a "heliotrope party," where every one was expected to

exercise ingenuity round the word "heliotrope" with pencil and paper, the prizes being tied with heliotrope ribbon, and so on. Then there had been the pastoral play, a tea-party at her own home, a picnic with the Merrimans, and the famous garden-party itself. And engagements of the same sort filled the days to come.

Of course it was all great fun, but somehow she was vaguely disappointed. She had expected something different, but she scarcely knew what.

The Lloyds' house was of the same date as "The Limes," but much smaller. It stood in the village street between a stucco-fronted grocer's shop and a small draper's shop, and its neat, white-framed front door opened with only one shallow intervening step directly on to the pavement.

Amaryllis rang the bell and was admitted into the narrow, oil-clothed passage. She pulled off her coat, gave her streaming umbrella to the maid, and found her way unannounced to the room at the back of the house that still went by the name of the play-room.

She was greeted by a chorus of welcome.

"Why, it's Amaryllis!"

"We thought we were never going to see you again!"

"This complete silence after Miss Stirling's departure struck us as ominous!"

"Come and have some coffee."

Amaryllis laughed as she ran with outstretched hands towards the ample figure of Mrs Lloyd, who was sitting by the table mending house-linen, and bent down to kiss her large, homely face.

"My dearest child, aren't you wet?" asked Mrs Lloyd, feeling Amaryllis all over with her big, soft hands. "No. Now you *will* have some coffee? Joan, dear, there is some, isn't there? Or we'll make some fresh in a moment."

"There's plenty, mamma," replied Joan, lifting the

tin coffee-pot out of the fender. "O Philippa, will you get another cup?"

"I've been wanting to come every day," said Amaryllis, suddenly disconcerted by the discovery that there was a stranger in the room, and not daring to look in his direction, "but we have always been doing something, and somehow in the mornings I . . . Anyway, I'm awfully glad it's wet to-day or we should have had to go to a tennis-party at Deane Court."

"And you didn't care to go?" asked Mrs Lloyd with genial comprehension, still holding the girl's hands. "Well, we are very glad too, since you have come here instead. Sit down, dear child."

And Amaryllis settled herself in an ancient leather armchair that stood sideways to the door-window.

"Amaryllis, you don't know Mr Rodwell, do you?" said Joan pouring out the coffee into the cup procured by Philippa, and performing the introduction with her eyes. "Kenneth, let me introduce you to Miss Gore-Smythe."

As Amaryllis responded to his greeting she received a general impression of a tall, thin, fair young man with wide moustache.

The play-room was large, light, and barely furnished. A grand piano stood along one wall, the key-board facing the window. A square of green drugget covered the centre of the floor, and the surrounding margin of boards was stained brown. Coloured nursery pictures of Mother Hubbard, Little Miss Muffet, John Gilpin, and Cherry Ripe hung on the gay, rose-patterned wall-paper, while over the fireplace and each side of it hung photographs of some of the Dutch old masters, Jan van Eyck, Van der Goes, and Quentyn Matsys. On the mantelpiece stood a little white statuette of the Virgin and Child, a pig money-box, a bronze candle extinguisher in the

shape of a French abbé, two blue and white old Italian chemist-pots. A glass bowl full of roses was on the table, which, covered with a green serge cloth, stood in the middle of the room.

Amaryllis always associated that table with Mrs Lloyd, who in all her leisure moments was to be found sitting beside it on an upright chair, the green table-cloth crumpled against her grey alpaca skirt, her work-basket gaping in front of her, full to overflowing with reels and tapes and buttons, while her big hands were busy with every variety of sewing. Mrs Lloyd was a large woman, tall as well as stout; her grey hair was brushed smoothly away from her forehead, her eyes were a faded blue, and she wore steel-rimmed spectacles. Her gowns were always rigidly plain; a loose blouse of the same colour as her skirt. Amaryllis sometimes wondered why Mrs Lloyd was impressive. Though she was attentive to general conversation, she seldom joined in it. She was genially hospitable and practically kind, the sort of person to whom one would go in trouble for comfort, but not for advice. She was too aloof, simple, and uncompromising. Yet her good opinion was eminently desirable, and though she rarely criticised another person's conduct, Amaryllis divined that her standard of right was unswervingly high. She was quite without the usual social amenities, and Mrs Gore-Smythe had several times remarked that she would as soon talk to the cook as to Mrs Lloyd.

"No doubt a very *good* woman, you know," she said, "but really impossible!"

Joan was in appearance a younger edition of her mother, plump, round-faced, with a pink-and-white complexion and smooth, brown hair. She wore *pince-nez*, which tipped up when she smiled and fell off when she laughed, and this happened so often that she caught and replaced them on her nose as a

matter of habit. She was now sitting on a small stool on the opposite side of the window to Amaryllis, smoking a cigarette very neatly.

Dr. Lloyd was pacing up and down the further end of the room, while Kenneth Rodwell was seated on the music-stool, his legs crossed, and Philippa leant back in the only other armchair, which was placed by the empty grate.

Dr. Lloyd was formidable in appearance. His features were extraordinarily rugged; a heavily-lined, lumpy forehead, a triangular frown between stiff, bushy eyebrows, a thick nose, slightly flattened towards the nostrils, and big, misshapen lips, the lower one protruding and unevenly divided by a deep crack. His cheeks were clean-shaven, but furrowed with lines; his iron-grey hair, thin at the top, was rather long round the base of his head and behind his ears, the ends being inclined to turn up. Joan once told him that it was quite dishonest for him to make such a show of ferocity in his features.

"No one just looking at you would believe that you really are quite tame," she said.

The doctor was wearing a loose smoking-jacket, and he held his hands behind his slightly-bowed back as he paced up and down. It was as characteristic of him to walk about the room as it was of his wife to sit sewing at the table, and from time to time he would stalk towards the rest of the party and join in the conversation, pointing at the person he was addressing.

Philippa was quite unlike her father or her mother. She was a slim girl, two or three years older than her sister. Her face was narrow, ending in a fine pointed chin. Her forehead under her smooth dark hair was white and square; her eyebrows were straight, her nose aquiline, and her lips, long, thin and very slightly curved, lay together in a certain chill refine-

ment. Like Joan, she was quick to laughter, but Amaryllis was conscious of a delicate inciviness in her merriment. She, too, was smoking.

As Amaryllis sipped her coffee, her spirits rose. She was happy and at her ease, and she gave a disjointed and whimsical account of the past week in reply to their questions.

"I've come to the conclusion that I don't like myself in my best clothes," she said presently. "I don't mean to look at ; I mean my *me*."

Dr Lloyd made an excursion into the conversation. He strode towards them.

"Quite right ! Quite right !" he said, pointing at Amaryllis. "No one should ever wear clothes they cannot forget."

"But what is the use of having pretty clothes if you forget you have got them on ?" remarked Philippa.

"It's a great disadvantage to feel well-dressed," said the doctor gravely. "It hampers the body and distracts the mind."

Amaryllis laughed. She had finished her coffee, and she placed the empty cup on the corner of the bookshelf just behind her.

"Have a cigarette?" said Joan mischievously. "Do ! Miss Stirling is a thing of the past."

"Oh, I don't think Miss Stirling would have disapproved of smoking, do you know—provided one did it at the right time," said Amaryllis.

"Try one," said Joan. "If you don't like it you can stop, and if you do, you will find it a great comfort. It's a first-rate substitute for an occupation ; every bit as good as walking up and down," she added, nodding at her father with a smile that upset her glasses.

"Have you given up your pipe, then ?" enquired Kenneth Rodwell of the doctor.

It was the first time he had spoken, and Amaryllis turned her eyes to observe him. She saw that he was

thin and brown, with a prominent Adam's apple in his lean throat, that he had light grey eyes set far apart, and short, fair, curly hair. He was wearing tweed clothes, a flannel shirt, and no collar. Her first thought was that he was unlike any one she had ever seen before; her next that his smile was charming.

"Don't you know that father allows himself no indulgences?" remarked Philippa, gazing at the tip of her cigarette, and knocking the ash away with her little finger.

Dr Lloyd made another descent upon the group, and threw out his finger at his eldest daughter.

"Now, what am I to understand by that?" he asked. "Do you imply that I am an interesting ascetic, or an aggressive prig?"

"I should hail you as a brother philosopher," said Kenneth Rodwell. "We proceed by different paths and reach the same place."

"A pipeless place?" enquired Joan.

"Well, not literally," he replied. "*I've* not reached that point of perfection yet, but then I've no wife and family."

"Ha!" remarked Dr Lloyd, putting his hands in his pockets.

"I'm glad you think we are as nice as a pipe," said Philippa.

"I want to know what conclusion I *have* arrived at," said Dr Lloyd to Rodwell.

"What conclusion?" he repeated.

"Well, if it's the same as yours, I presume you know what it is," said the doctor.

"Why, that the true philosophy of life lies in the absence of possessions, and habits, and conventions," replied Rodwell, "only you hold it on moral grounds and I don't."

"But there are some things one must possess," objected Joan.

"Why, yes, to be sure there are," he answered. "It's a question of drawing the line. Most people draw it just below the unattainable; I personally should draw it just above the tooth-brush. You see," he continued, "it comes to this: everything you possess, possesses you, and the man of many possessions is no longer a free agent. He hasn't a chance, poor devil."

Amaryllis broke into a gay little laugh.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you mean like one's best clothes—they hamper the body and distract the mind."

"Quite true! Quite true!" said the doctor. "There is no way out of the house of bondage but across the desert."

"Do you suppose the Israelites had tooth-brushes?" asked Philippa thoughtfully.

"But, Dr Lloyd," said Amaryllis, sitting upright, "do you think it *wrong* to have possessions? To be rich, I mean."

"Well, no," he said slowly; "the thing is not wrong in itself, but there are very few characters that can stand wealth without deteriorating."

"But—but *why*?" she asked.

The doctor took a turn to the end of the room and back.

"Well, it's odd that it should be so," he said, "but grinding poverty and wealth seem to have an equally materialistic effect upon the character. And wealth is the worse of the two, because its effect is more subtle. One would have thought that wealth would have meant liberty, and it does mean liberty of action, but that's not much use if the mind is clogged. The mischief lies in what one takes for granted," he continued. "Indeed that is where the great difference is between any two people—not in what they say, but in what they consider unnecessary to say."

Kenneth looked worried.

"I say, do you always apply such uncommonly refined tests to the characters of your acquaintances?" he asked. "It gives one a horrid feeling of insecurity."

"Ha!" said the doctor abruptly, "I begin to suspect I am a prig."

"I really don't know what I do take for granted," said Joan. "I suppose that is just the point."

"Let us search our hearts," said Philippa gravely. "Such an opportunity for talking about oneself is too good to be missed."

They all laughed.

"Well, now, isn't it absurd," cried Kenneth, "that we should greet such a sensible suggestion with laughter? The idea that one should not talk about oneself is indefensible. Why shouldn't one? Every one enjoys discussing his own character; even a defect has a charm if it is peculiar to oneself. But the man who talks about himself is at once condemned as boring, narrow, and unsympathetic. And so he is, under the present conditions, because only those of blunt perceptions ever do talk about themselves, and of course they ought not to talk about anything. But just think of the entertainment and valuable information intelligent people could give if they were encouraged to talk openly about themselves. It is sheer waste not to give the world the benefit of the exceptional opportunities that one has of knowing one's own character."

"Yes!" said the doctor. "All very well if people knew how to make use of their opportunities, but hardly any one establishes any intimate relations with himself. A man regards himself very much as he regards other people—only with more interest—and as he believes and hopes other people regard him. During the greater part of his time he is simply a third person to himself, and it does not occur to him

to discover in himself the explanation of all that is unexplained in other people. Exceptional opportunities! I should think they were! But it is a shock to see into yourself; as exciting as it would be to see into the mind of your neighbour."

Amaryllis suddenly sat up.

"O Dr Lloyd," she said, "I believe that's what happened to me the other day!"

"What?"

"I—I met myself," she said, laughing, "and I was so surprised."

"Ha!" he said, pointing at her with his forefinger, "pursue the acquaintance, my child—pursue the acquaintance."

CHAPTER V

ABOUT three o'clock on that afternoon Mrs Gore-Smythe began to wonder what had become of Amaryllis.

After lunch she had gone to her own sitting-room, and, comfortably settled in an armchair, she had passed the time in reading, with mingled interest and irritation, a sensational novel of love and murder. It was an exciting story, but the murderer was described in the conventional way. His wickedness was taken for granted.

"So stupid!" thought Henrietta.

Criminals were hardly ever made really interesting and human in books. No author ever seemed to *believe* in a criminal that was not a monster, or to take trouble to understand such a character. And yet a nature that could do actions on the scale of crime was far more worth describing than that of an ordinary law-abiding person. Some one had once said that the greatest sinners made the greatest saints, and Henrietta was struck with the truth of the saying.

She put down the book and glanced up towards the window. It had stopped raining; there was a gleam of sunshine. However, it was out of the question to go to Deane Court, which meant a long drive, and the tennis-ground would be far too wet to play after such a morning. But they might go and call on the Stauntons. She would like to tell Mrs Staunton how charmingly Edith had acted in the pastoral play. Any praise of Edith always pleased Mrs Staunton; and, besides, it was true.

Henrietta got up and wandered about the room. She folded up a newspaper and put it on the lower half of a small table. She pulled a dead flower out of a vase, and threw it into the waste-paper basket, and she coerced a top-heavy rose to keep its stalk in the water.

Then she went to look out of the window again. Yes, it certainly was going to be fine.

Mrs Gore-Smythe went to find Amaryllis. She went first to the old school-room, now the girl's own sitting-room, then to Amaryllis's bed-room next to it. Then she went down to the drawing-room, but Amaryllis was nowhere to be found. Henrietta went to the study, softly opened the door and peeped in. No; as she expected, only Frank was there, taking his afternoon nap, his book open on his knees, slackly held by his right hand, his head thrown back and his mouth open.

Henrietta returned to the drawing-room and rang the bell.

"Do you know where Miss Amaryllis is?" she asked the parlourmaid.

"Miss Amaryllis went out, m'm, immediately after lunch."

Henrietta was vexed and disappointed. How tiresome of her to go off like that without saying where she was going! And it was turning out a beautiful afternoon.

She opened the door-windows wide, and gazed out into the garden. Every leaf was glistening in the sunshine. Big clouds with shining, ragged edges were being swept away from a clean, clear space of sky.

Henrietta, who was wearing a gown of delicate grey voile, seated herself in an armchair near the window. It was a white chair, upholstered with old rose coloured brocade. She opened an old-fashioned work-table that stood beside it, lined with green silk,

and divided into innumerable small, dainty compartments, and from its centre she took out a piece of fine embroidery, a cushion-cover of Morris pattern, worked with Morris silks.

Embroidery was her favourite occupation. Her needlework was very good, firm even both fine and bold. Its excellence gave her a sense of achievement. She liked to be seen working, but even when alone she had a comfortable feeling of completeness as she sat there, beautifully dressed, her exquisite work-table beside her, handling soft, gleaming silks, and dreaming!

To-day, however, her thoughts were perturbed. She was uneasy about Amaryllis. The child was too—too independent. And yet that was not quite the right word, for certainly she had so far been very amenable. But Henrietta felt apprehensively that there was nothing permanent in their relations. Amaryllis was docile, because she did not yet know what she wanted. She was withholding her judgment, looking, observing, questioning, which of course would be all very well if one could have any confidence that she would accept what was told her. But the child was not so sensitive to her mother's influence as could be wished. To be sure, it was early days to judge; still, Henrietta saw many little indications that Amaryllis was disposed to be antagonistic to—well, to the ordinary usages of society.

Mrs Gore-Smythe finished a needleful of the silk, snipped off the end, and re-threaded her needle.

No! that frame of mind was not a good one. It was not normal, and people did not like abnormal girls. Mrs Gore-Smythe sighed. The child must go out and about as much as possible. At present she did not show to advantage at social gatherings. She was apt to retire into herself and say nothing, and unless she made an effort to make herself agreeable,

she would inevitably be passed over. Only pretty girls could afford to be shy. It was provoking, for the child had a real charm when she was in the right mood, and Henrietta fairly laughed as she thought of Amaryllis in one of her moments of half-tender, half-whimsical eagerness.

If only she would show that side to other people!

For a little while, at this point, Henrietta's whole attention was given to the making of two or three French knots. Then her thoughts took a slightly different turn.

Of course, the more Amaryllis went out the fewer opportunities she would have of going to the Lloyds, and though she might meet the two girls in other people's houses, that did not matter so much. To be sure, one might have thought that going to their house would have disillusioned her, and Henrietta considered that it showed a certain bluntness of perception in the child that she should still care to go there.

The look of worry deepened on Mrs Gore-Smythe's face. No doubt that was where Amaryllis had gone this afternoon. It was really very difficult and tiresome. One could hardly be downright rude to the Lloyds. That would be most unwise. For one thing, it would inevitably rouse Amaryllis to take their part. Besides, Henrietta had a horror of any declared unpleasantness between neighbours. No, it would be far better to undermine their influence upon the child, and bring her to see for herself that they were not the sort of people that one cared to know too intimately. No doubt she *would* come to see it, sooner or later. After all, it was quite common for girls to take unaccountable and exaggerated likings for people.

"Though I don't know that *I* ever did," thought Mrs Gore-Smythe, and she pondered with absorption upon her own character as a girl.

Then she recalled with a delicious tremour of excitement the account of her first marriage that she had given to Amaryllis. What impression had it made on her? In her place, Henrietta felt that she would have brooded for days over so interesting a story, filling in the details, and looking up with reverence towards the heroine of it. She went over again every word of their conversation. She re-experienced the thrill she had felt at Amaryllis's questions, and she was proud of her self-control.

The only thing that a little marred her pleasure was the dread of what Frank would think if he knew. She was sure he would disapprove; he would say she had been wantonly rash. But that was absurd, for there was no reason why Amaryllis should ever know more.

Good God! *No!* The mere thought of such a thing really terrified her.

She looked up with a smile as Frank came into the room.

"I am going to see Merriman," he said, "about that question of the school-teachers. There's a meeting to-morrow morning, and I want to put my view before him first. If I can make sure of his support, the matter will be settled in half an hour."

Henrietta glanced at the clock.

"Won't you have tea first?" she said. "It's past four. They may just as well bring it in now."

"Oh no!" he said. "Merriman will give me tea. Where is Amaryllis?"

"She went out after lunch," replied Henrietta.

"What! In the rain!" he exclaimed. "Where has she gone?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs Gore-Smythe carelessly. She was not yet prepared to discuss with Frank Amaryllis's relations to the Lloyds; at any rate not at this particular moment.

Frank felt that he wanted to object, but no reasonable objection presented itself to his mind, and Henrietta's manner gave him no opening to do so. After a second's vacillation he discovered that he was in a hurry.

"Well, I must be off," he said. "Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye," she said, nodding and smiling to him as he went to the door.

At half-past four tea was brought in, and immediately after Mrs Staunton was announced.

Mrs Staunton was a big, handsome, middle-aged woman, with clear, aquiline features and a friendly smile. There was an undercurrent of majestic sadness in her manner, but she expressed herself like a girl in staccato, tentative phrases, with an occasional unexpected felicity of epithet. Her one idea of happiness was to have "a good time." She was active, danced vigorously, rode hard, played tennis, and she loved horses and dogs.

As she entered Henrietta sprang up, eager and smiling.

"Oh, dear Mrs Staunton, how glad I am to see you!" she cried. "Do you know, I was on the point of coming to you. This is positively the first free afternoon I have had for ages. Of course, with a daughter to take about. . . . And I did so want to tell you how charming we thought Edith in the play."

"Did you? I'm so glad. How nice of you to say so!" interposed Mrs Staunton, while Henrietta continued:

"She acted so well and looked so pretty. I tried to find you afterwards, but it was such a crush."

And Mrs Staunton, speaking almost at the same time, was saying:

"I think it so wonderful the way Mrs Bruce got it all up. A tremendous labour, you know. You've no idea! And wasn't it lucky it was fine?"

"Do sit down," said Henrietta. "You will have some tea, won't you? Do you take cream? Sugar? Yes, even a cloudy afternoon would have spoilt the effect, but as it was——"

She broke off as the door opened, and Lady Scrymgeour was announced.

Henrietta rose, this time with less eagerness, and went forward to greet the old lady, who advanced leaning on her umbrella, and stumping across the room with short-sighted deliberation.

"There's too much furniture here," she remarked in her dry voice, apparently unconscious that she was speaking aloud. "How d'ye do, Mrs Gore-Smythe," she said, standing still to hold out her hand.

Her jet-trimmed bonnet was unstable in the extreme, shaking with every movement of her head in spite of the strings tied under her chin. Her small round face was puckered all over, including the small round nose, and small round mouth. The eyelids drooped over the outer corner of the eyes, but appeared to have had tucks run in them to hitch them up in the corner.

"I've just seen Amaryllis," she announced as soon as she was safely seated, her wide-striped black and white silk skirt spreading over the chair, "but she didn't see me."

"How is Amaryllis?" enquired Mrs Staunton. "I suppose she's enjoying herself no end now she's out of the school-room."

"She was coming out of the Lloyds' house," continued Lady Scrymgeour, "with Joan Lloyd and young Rodwell."

Henrietta felt a thrill of dismay.

"Young Rodwell!" she echoed. "Who is he?"

Lady Scrymgeour's twinkling eyes glanced at her shrewdly, while Mrs Staunton replied:

"Oh, he's one of the Sussex Rodwells—a tremend-

ously old family. People with a pedigree two yards long and no morals, you know."

Lady Scrymgeour chuckled.

"My absurd nephew goes there to gamble away the money he has not got," she said, and sipped her tea. "What very nasty tea. China, h'm! Modern fads."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried poor Henrietta. "Do let me get you some fresh."

"Eh, what?" said the old lady, not understanding.

"Let me have some other tea made for you," urged Henrietta.

"More tea? No, thanks. I haven't done this yet."

"They've an awfully jolly old house," continued Mrs Staunton, "awfully beautiful, really. I went there once. I was staying with friends near Camberly. Everything was tremendously dilapidated and romantic. I believe they have done it up since then. Mr Rodwell has married an heiress."

"It's a habit he has," remarked Lady Scrymgeour. "I knew him years ago. Perfectly charming and quite wicked. I fell in love with him at first sight. We used to dance together."

"And this young Mr Rodwell?" began Henrietta anxiously.

"He's a son of one of the heiresses, one of the later ones," said Lady Scrymgeour.

Mrs Gore-Smythe laughed uneasily.

"What is he doing here?" she asked.

"Oh, he's staying with the Lloyds. I believe they got to know each other somehow through music," said Mrs Staunton. "Somebody said—I don't know if it is true—that he plays in the orchestras of London theatres."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Henrietta.

"Bless me! I didn't hear anything so respectable," said Lady Scrymgeour maliciously. "I was told that

he played in the streets, and at the doors of public-houses."

Henrietta turned to Mrs Staunton.

"Have you met him?"

"I was introduced to him yesterday. I met him and Dr Lloyd in the road. He is peculiar, certainly. —The sort of young man who wears no collar, and tells the truth, don't you know," she said with her friendly smile.

Lady Scrymgeour snorted.

"There! That's the only idea of wickedness that the young men of to-day can rise to," she cried, rapping with her umbrella on the floor. "Of course, they want to be wicked—every one does! And that's all they can think of—to wear no collars, and to speak the truth! All sinners are prigs nowadays, Heaven help us!"

As she spoke they heard the front door shut, and a sound of voices in the hall. The next moment the door opened, and Amaryllis, with Joan Lloyd and Kenneth Rodwell, came in.

"Joan and Mr Rodwell walked back with me," she explained, "and so I've brought them in to tea."

Henrietta could never be otherwise than gracious, unless she had actually lost her temper. It was natural to her to make the best of herself to every one, and she now greeted Joan and Kenneth Rodwell as if she were really glad to see them.

As Kenneth shook hands with Lady Scrymgeour, she eyed him sharply, and said:

"Why don't you wear one?"

"One what?" he asked.

"A collar."

"Because I'm more comfortable without," he said quite gravely.

"H'm!" she said. "I'm not sure that you *do* speak the truth after all."

"Have I been accused of doing so?"

"Yes; we've been backbiting you," she replied. "I knew your father years ago," she added abruptly.

Amaryllis was standing by Mrs Staunton. Henrietta, glancing at her daughter, thought she was looking her best, which was odd, as she had on only that old brown tweed. But brown suited her warm, clear complexion. Her quaint features were alert, too, and under her thick eyebrows were bright.

"Are you having a good time, now Miss Stirling has gone?" said Mrs Staunton, smiling.

Amaryllis nodded with an answering smile.

"She was very strict, wasn't she?" suggested Mrs Staunton.

"The nicest thing of all," said Amaryllis suddenly, "is that there is so much time to do everything. I'm sure it's a great mistake to be methodical."

Henrietta looked up, and stopped asking Joan if she liked sugar in her tea.

"What are you saying, Amaryllis?" she enquired.

Amaryllis half turned and addressed them all.

"I'm sure it is," she cried eagerly. "If you do things only at stated times every day, and just for so long, it means that there are a lot of things that have to be got through, while there is no time left to really *do* anything."

"She's not as pretty as her mother," murmured Lady Scrymgeour, and every one carefully took no notice.

"It's a good thing father isn't here to hear you utter such heresies," said Henrietta, laughing.

"Miss Stirling couldn't exist without a time-table though," said Amaryllis thoughtfully; "but then she never really wanted to do anything—she only did it because it was the right time for it. I'm sure she wound up her conscience with her watch."

"H'm!" said Lady Scrymgeour, "so that if her

time-table included telling a lie at nine o'clock, stealing a cheque at three, and committing a murder at six, she would follow it out conscientiously."

"Ah, now you start an interesting problem," remarked Rodwell.

"I don't," she retorted. "I never did such a thing in my life. I've no use for problems or theories or any other such vapour. Well, what is the problem?"

"Why, I'm not sure that Miss Stirling isn't right, and that crime is not simply an action done at the wrong time," he said. "It is quite conceivable that if one knew the right time to commit a murder, or defraud one's neighbour, they would be quite praiseworthy actions."

Henrietta felt that her cheeks were flushed, but she knew that the colour in her face was never so conspicuous as it felt, and she was thankful for the natural pallor of her skin.

"But one never can know the right time," objected Joan.

"You can't tell *that* time of day by the watch," remarked Lady Scrymgeour.

"That's a difficulty, certainly," said Kenneth, "but I think the person who wants to do the deed is a fair judge of it on the whole, just because he does want to do it. That in itself is an indication that there is some use in it."

"Words! words! words!" cried Lady Scrymgeour, rapping on the floor with her umbrella. "That's what is the matter with all of you nowadays. You talk about everything, and then think you have done it or are capable of doing it. Battle, murder, and sudden death, and all the rest of it. Bless me! Can you kill a mouse?"

"Would that give me a right to discuss killing my neighbour?" asked Rodwell.

"Aren't they dreadful?" said Henrietta, smiling to

Mrs Staunton, but her hands were uncomfortably moist.

"So amusing!" murmured Mrs Staunton.

"In my time we used to do things first, and discuss them after—if they would bear discussion," said the old lady. "Ask your father."

"O Lady Scrymgeour," cried Amaryllis, "did you ever kill any one?"

Henrietta took out her handkerchief and desperately applied it to her nose, patting and rubbing her upper lip with it for some seconds.

"Aha! Miss Impertinent!" cried Lady Scrymgeour with a chuckle. "Now when are you coming to see me? Come and spend the day. Can you play picquet? Come on Thursday. What! Engaged? Thursday evening then, to dinner?"

"I can, mother, can't I?" said Amaryllis eagerly.

"Yes, darling," said Henrietta. "Thank you so much, Lady Scrymgeour. It will be a great pleasure to her."

"H'm! To spend the evening with an old woman?" replied Lady Scrymgeour. "No, I won't ask you to do that. We must have some other young people to keep you company. You!" nodding at Rodwell, with a malicious side-glance at Henrietta. "You come too. Joan will bring you. Eh, Joan? You play whist?"

"I'm afraid not," he replied; "I don't play cards at all but I play almost everything else, even the clarionet."

"What! Your father's son not play cards!" she cried. "Oh, futile generation! We have dealt to you, and you have not even picked up your hand! Well, come anyhow, and pipe to us, if that is more in your line."

CHAPTER VI

OLD Lady Scrymgeour lived at Wrottle End with her grandson, Sir Roger, and his mother, also a widow. The elder woman had two living children, a son and a daughter, both married, but the younger Lady Scrymgeour had lost her husband before the birth of her only child. She was a tall, distinguished-looking woman, deliberate in movement and in mind. She was gracious, gentle and devout. She disliked and disapproved of modern ideas, modern haste, modern restlessness and want of dignity. Rigid in her opinions, she was tender, staunch and devoted. She did not love many people, but when she loved, she did so with profound self-abnegation.

People who knew her well guessed that she had passed through some time of prolonged tribulation, but only her sister-in-law, Beatrice Middleton, knew that she had been fiercely tempted to commit the sin which she herself judged unpardonable. She had been tempted and she had resisted, and because she had resisted she had no mercy upon those who proved weaker. Possibly she was jealous of their stolen happiness; the memory of her own pain made her uncompromising.

Not only was she an excellent housewife, but she understood the management of the estate, which had been practically under her direction until her son had come of age. It was characteristic of her to give consideration to every matter, however trivial, that was brought to her notice. She thought it over, and arrived at some conclusion concerning it before it was

dismissed from her mind, though as she grew older her bias towards conventional judgments became more marked.

At the time of her unhappiness she had recoiled within herself, and though its acuteness was now a thing of the past, the habit of abstraction from the life round her still showed itself in an inattentiveness to everything but what was interesting her for the moment.

She and her mother-in-law were on terms of affectionate but critical intimacy. The younger woman was amused by the old lady's brusque remarks, and she tolerated her eccentricities because with it all the dowager was essentially a gentlewoman, well-born and well-bred, and in all her more fundamental opinions, perfectly conventional.

On the other hand, old Lady Scrymgeour had some admiration for her daughter-in-law.

"You are essentially *grande dame*, my dear Amy," she said to her on one occasion, but Amy was absorbed in re-potting some cuttings, and did not hear. The old lady was standing at the door of the greenhouse, leaning on her stick, a large straw hat on her head tied under her chin with black ribbons. She rapped impatiently on the ground.

"I wish you would listen when one pays you compliments!" she snapped, and Amy looked round, gently questioning.

"I was saying that you are very much of a *grande dame*," repeated old Lady Scrymgeour. "I can even forgive you your virtue, because it makes you so complete. You wouldn't be half so effective if you were not as narrow as a piece of tape."

"I suppose people do think me old-fashioned and narrow," said Amy reflectively, carefully patting down the earth in a flower-pot. She thought the point over, and decided that she did not mind if that were

the judgment passed on her. What she regretted was, that there were not more people who cared for the old traditions of good breeding.

When old Lady Scrymgeour returned from her visit to Mrs Gore-Smythe, she stumped straight into the drawing-room, where Amy was sitting in a corner of a stiff-backed sofa, her beautifully shaped head bent a little forward over some needle-work that she was doing. She looked up as her mother-in-law entered.

"Ah, dear granny, so you're back."

"Amy," said Lady Scrymgeour, seating herself on a chair opposite her, "I'm going to give a party for the propagating of *mésalliances*."

Amy looked at her for a second as if she had not understood; then, the phrase soaking in, she laughed.

"We'll send Roger out of the way," continued the old lady, nodding her head. "If charity should begin at home, the whole point of a *mésalliance* is that it should take place amongst one's neighbours. By the way, did you ever know the Rodwells?"

"No, I never met them," replied Amy. "Wasn't one of them rather a ne'er-do-weel? Oh yes! I remember. He married one of the Hetts of Broom Place, and there was a great fuss about it."

"She had money," replied Lady Scrymgeour, "and on her mother's side was related to Lord Stowel. They made the most of that relationship. Her grandfather, old Daniel Hett, made all his money in cotton. A terrible old tyrant he was! He married his son to Lord Stowel's daughter, who hadn't a halfpenny, and he bullied them both, and their children, too. If they rebelled he cut off supplies. There are endless stories about the way he used to sit in his shirt-sleeves in the hall, smoking a clay pipe, with a horse-whip by his side. If any one contradicted him, he lashed out with the whip."

"There were two girls, weren't there?" asked Amy. "I mean granddaughters of this old Daniel?"

"I believe there were. And as soon as the old man died, they gave themselves airs, and no family was good enough to be connected with them. And the end of it was, one of them married Christopher Rodwell, and the other never married at all. Well, one of the young Rodwells is staying with the Lloyds."

"Oh, really," exclaimed Amy with interest.

"I think he's a son by a later marriage though," said old Lady Scrymgeour. "He has something of the Rodwell charm, but he's not as good-looking as his father. Anyhow, he's as impecunious and ineligible as could be wished, and I've asked him and Amaryllis Gore-Smythe to dine here on Thursday. Joan Lloyd is coming too, and I'm going to ask Dick Bruce to meet her. That'll please Mrs Bruce, eh, Amy?"

The younger Lady Scrymgeour smiled indulgently.

"I suppose you saw Amaryllis, then?" she enquired, in her quiet, reflective manner.

"Yes. A nice child. She is improving fast. Not pretty, but uncommon! Quite uncommon!"

"I hope Roger won't fall in love with *her*," murmured Amy.

"Bless me, Amy! Why should he?" cried the old lady. "He sees plenty of other young women more likely to take his fancy than Amaryllis. My dear, will you write a note to Dick Bruce?"

Meanwhile, as soon as her visitors had gone, Henrietta's accumulated emotions found vent in unreasonable anger. Trembling all over, and her heart beating fast, she swung round towards the startled Amaryllis.

"How could you bring that insufferable young man here?" she demanded.

Amaryllis opened her eyes wide in bewilderment and growing dismay.

"O *mother!*" she protested.

"Have you absolutely no perceptions of what a gentleman should be?" cried Henrietta, giddy with anger, while her words seemed to come almost independently of herself. "An insolent young boor who doesn't trouble himself to observe the A B C of civilised behaviour!"

"But, mother," cried Amaryllis quickly, "the Lloyds and Lady Scrymgeour——"

"The Lloyds!" cried Henrietta. "Ah, of course! You quote the Lloyds! Do you accept *their* standard of refinement? Do you think *they* are judges of good manners? I did hope that the influence at home was strong enough to keep you uncontaminated. But it doesn't seem to have occurred to you that it was not for *you* to invite a strange young man to tea. Have you no instinct for propriety? *That* is the sort of thing one doesn't expect to have to tell a girl in so many words. It's a good thing for you that father was not at home——"

Amaryllis gave her mother a look of anguish, and without a word fled from the room and up to her own bedroom.

As soon as Henrietta was alone she missed the means of consuming her rage. She was still tremulous, her head was throbbing, and she felt in want of some tangible support. She moved futile about the room, unable to be still and unable to do anything.

Then suddenly she sat down, covered her face with her hands, and wept aloud.

"Hateful old woman!" she sobbed.

She cried till she could cry no more, and then leant back in her chair, her eyes hot and swollen, two burning patches on her cheeks and a slight headache. She almost enjoyed the calm of exhaustion which had taken possession of her.

Unconsciously, she was a little gratified at so much incontestable proof of her sensitiveness. Her outbreak of temper had taken her by surprise. She had not really lost control of herself like that for many years. But certainly the strain put upon her had been severe.

She was a little disturbed at the thought of the effect on Amaryllis. She had not intended to attack the child in that precipitate way. However, probably no harm was done, and the very hastiness with which she had spoken would make the lesson go home. And the lesson was necessary, especially as Amaryllis was going to meet him again on Thursday.

Mrs Gore-Smythe began to tremble again.

"She shan't go," she thought. "I won't let her go."

She could send an excuse of a forgotten engagement, or even of a headache, at the last moment. And yet, no! Lady Scrymgeour would see through such an excuse; even if it were true, she would suspect the contrary, and Henrietta could not face the possibility of the old lady's amusement. Also she might choose to be offended, and however intolerable she might be, she was a power in Hadbury.

"And perhaps Sir Roger will be there," thought Mrs Gore-Smythe, coming to the conclusion that Lady Scrymgeour's grandson would effectually counterbalance the objectionable Kenneth Rodwell.

Meanwhile, Amaryllis, having locked the door of her bedroom, sat down on a low chair, and propping her elbows on her knees, she held her head between her hands, the palms pressed against her ears, and her slim fingers crooked in her hair.

For a long time she was incapable of thought; she felt as if she were staring at the hurt in her own soul.

The horrible thing was that it had never occurred

to her that she could be forward. The very innocence with which she had acted rendered her incapable of judging whether her mother's accusation was just or not.

At last she did move, letting her hands drop on to her lap and leaning back, and the physical action seemed to stir in her great depths of depression. Tears slowly gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

It was not until the next day that her independent judgment asserted itself, and then it was Henrietta's abuse of the Lloyds that roused her to question the justice of her mother's point of view. Her whole soul rose in protest at such a reflection on the Lloyds. She thought of them as a family and individually, of the terms they were on with each other, of their real unworldliness.

Her mother did not know them ; she never saw them in intimacy, or she could not do other than love and admire them. It was quite characteristic of them to see nothing amiss in Amaryllis's cordiality to Mr Rodwell. They had a certain simplicity and directness of judgment which instinctively she recognised meant in itself refinement and purity of outlook.

The more she thought about it, the more she was perplexed at her mother's outbreak of indignation. She could not believe that Henrietta had meant all she had said. Her sense of what was reasonable was offended by an anger so out of proportion to the occasion.

Suddenly it dawned on her that her mother was afraid of her liking Kenneth Rodwell too much, and a hot resentment, mingled with a rather scornful amusement at having probed Henrietta's mind, took possession of her.

She scouted the idea of caring for him, indeed of caring for any one she knew. She took it for granted

that she would fall in love some day, but the future object of her affections was as unreal as the hero of a novel, and the mere fact that she was acquainted with a man had hitherto put him out of reckoning.

But after the first feeling of outrage she became curious. She began to think about Kenneth Rodwell with great attention. She recalled every detail of his appearance and conversation, and she came to the conclusion that he was extremely nice. She liked him, but she liked him as a friend. That was all! Her mother need not have lost her temper, and said unjust and unkind things just for *that*!

In spite of this, however, Amaryllis felt some disturbance at the thought of meeting Kenneth Rodwell at Lady Scrymgeour's, but her self-consciousness vanished when face to face with his complete unconcern; she immediately found that she could not be bothered with any such ideas. The party was a merry one. Dick Bruce was enchanted by the discovery that Joan's glasses fell off when she laughed, and he devoted himself throughout the evening to chaffing her. After dinner, old Lady Scrymgeour herself sat down at the piano at one end of the big double drawing-room and sang "Oh, bocca, bocca bella," in a voice as faded, thin and sweet as an old spinet. Then Kenneth Rodwell fetched his violin from the hall, and Joan accompanying him, they played a violin sonata of Brahms. Presently Joan and Dick drifted into the back drawing-room, and a rubber of whist was started, while Amaryllis and Kenneth remained looking through the pile of music that Lady Scrymgeour had brought out. Then Amaryllis took Joan's place at the piano, and they tried one thing after another. Without performing really well she played very intelligently, and she read music easily. By the end of the evening she discovered that she and Kenneth were frankly friends, while all sentiment was beside the point.

These terms between them were confirmed the next day. On her way to play tennis with Edith Staunton she met Kenneth at the door of the Catholic Church. He was coming out with some music under his arm.

"Hallo!" he said in friendly greeting as he saw her, and she stopped to speak to him.

"Have you been playing the organ?" she asked.

"No, I've only been looking through the music," he replied, "and I'm carrying off a lot to try over with Dr Lloyd. I wouldn't trust him to fetch it himself. I was afraid he would meet a beggar and go off to clothe and feed him, you know. Or he might have begun to pray once he got in there"—he jerked his head in the direction of the church—"and forgotten all about this world in general and this heretic in particular."

"Then you? *You* aren't a Roman Catholic?" she asked.

"I? Oh no!" he said coolly. "I've no religion. I don't even believe in myself!"

She was taken aback. In the world of the Gore-Smythes such things were never said in jest or in earnest. She glanced at him quickly with questioning eyes, and said nothing.

Kenneth was a little sorry to have startled her, and he turned it off with a laugh.

"Why, you know, how are you to believe in yourself when you are not only a whole dramatic company but the audience too, and especially when half-way through every performance the audience and actors suddenly change functions? I say," he went on, "some of this old music looks ripping. Look here!"

He placed the books on the low wall enclosing the church and opened them. Amaryllis propped her racquet against the gate, and, leaning her elbows on the wall, gazed at the pages, as he turned them, and pointed out the harmonies.

"You ought to have brought Dr Lloyd with you," she remarked presently, "and kept him under your eye. Probably he will have disappeared when you get back."

"Not this time," said Kenneth drily. "I've locked him into the play-room!"

She broke into a peal of laughter.

"Not *really*?" she said incredulously.

In reply he pulled the key out of his pocket.

"I daresay he's getting impatient by now," he said. "Come on! Let's go and let him out. I say, some of these things are scored as trios and quartets. I wonder how he got hold of them? But come on! We'll try them all."

Amaryllis was fired with interest in the music. She completely forgot that she had been going to the Stauntons, and she turned and walked with Kenneth Rodwell towards the Lloyd's house, leaving her racquet and shoes propped against the gate, whence they were removed about half an hour later by a woman carrying a large basket of crockery for sale.

CHAPTER VII

KENNETH RODWELL spent several weeks with the Lloyds that summer. Once or twice he spoke of going away, but he confessed when questioned that there was no particular reason for his presence elsewhere, and the Lloyds urged him to stay on. He was well content to remain with them: the homely unconventionality of their household was congenial to him.

Kenneth was extremely sociable; he liked everybody and most people liked him. Yet he was not without discrimination; only when any one offended against his code of morals or manners he just waited till that person had done, and then resumed intercourse as if nothing had happened. He felt a sort of vicarious shame for his neighbour's errors, and was as hurriedly anxious to ignore them as if he himself were guilty.

No difference of opinion, or character, or circumstance upset his universal friendliness, and consequently his circle of acquaintance was large and varied. During his stay in Hadbury he became intimate with the newspaper man, who was a Tory when drunk and a Revolutionary when sober, with the Methodist cobbler, the old woman who kept a shop of fancy work, the Catholic priest, the Rector, the two old Miss Palmers whose father had been a General in the artillery and "a very *dashing* officer,"

and whose chief interests besides the memory of their parent were philanthropy and gardening, the two Lady Scrymgeours, young Dick Bruce, and Amaryllis Gore-Smythe.

The rest of the inhabitants tolerated him as odd and amusing, but on the whole they liked him. Their attitude was, in a less degree, very much the same as that of the younger Lady Scrymgeour, who regretted that he did not go to church, but was indulgent to his unconventionality because he was a man, and who, while in theory she could believe no good of any one advocating democratic ideas, yet found it impossible to condemn any one so gentle. It had a little troubled her at first to find that she could not dislike this young man, who held opinions that she considered sinful; opinions which she believed no one could hold *sincerely*, but which had their foundation in a perverse desire to be thought clever and original. However, she thought him over, and came to the conclusion that he was a victim of the modern method of bringing up the young, and contrasting him with her own son, she felt compassion for the poor young man.

But if Kenneth Rodwell's relations with other people were simple, his relations with himself were complicated.

"I need a lot of explanation," he remarked one day as they sat at supper; "one side of me is perfectly commonplace. By nature I thrill to the obvious. 'Home sweet Home' moves me almost to tears. I can perform it with *heart*. You should just hear me! The heroism of the melodrama, the pathos of self-sacrifice and children and mothers and angels stir me up no end. My instinct would always be to play to the gallery. In fact, I *am* one of the gallery. But the bother is, my brain won't sit in the gallery with the rest of me. Hang it all! It's such a deuced

superior brain! Now, my brother Nicholas," he added, "is quite complete, but then he's completely wicked."

"Pray, which side of you do you consider the good one?" enquired Philippa.

He considered.

"Why, I've always taken it for granted that the conventional side was the good one," he replied.

"Ha!" said the doctor. "Now what do you mean by conventional?"

Kenneth glanced at him quickly, with a smile in his eyes.

"The reverse of unconventional," he said. "No! don't abuse me. I'm not quibbling. It is the most comprehensive definition if you want a short one. You ought to define unconventionality first."

"Right!" said the doctor. "If nobody had been unconventional, nobody would have been called conventional. Certainly it is a term no one ever applies to himself."

"Isn't unconventionality really sincerity?" suggested Joan. "It practically comes to that, doesn't it? Thinking for yourself and acting accordingly——"

"That's about it," said Dr Lloyd; "but the point is, I think, that it gives you space to carry vice and virtue to almost any degree. Conventionality is a sort of tube, and once inside it, you can only be as good or bad as you've got room for."

"And the advantage of conventionality is that nobody can find out which you are," said Philippa.

"Do you know who is really and truly unconventional," said Joan, with an air of having made a discovery, "only she hasn't much chance to show it?"

"Who?" asked Kenneth.

"Amaryllis."

"Ha!" said the doctor, nodding his head. "Little Amaryllis?"

Kenneth regarded Joan thoughtfully, until Philippa

suddenly laughed, and then he looked at her and wondered why she was amused.

"Doesn't it strike you that she has changed lately?" enquired Dr Lloyd. "A few weeks ago she was a child."

"I don't think she is quite happy," said Mrs Lloyd in her full, kindly voice. She was presiding as usual at the head of the table, silent but attentive, and her personality dominating them all.

"Happy!" cried Joan, with energy. "No! I should think not! Why, Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe are always finding fault with her. Nothing she does is ever right. Lady Scrymgeour was talking about it the other day, and so was Edith Staunton. And Amaryllis is so gentle, she never attempts to stand up for herself. I can't think why. She used to have such a hot temper. And then, Mrs Gore-Smythe will drag her to every sort of party, whether she wants to go or not, and she lectures her all the time about her clothes and manners, and what to talk about and what not to talk about."

Dr Lloyd pushed away his plate and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Is that so?" he said, frowning heavily. "Poor child! Poor child!" Then he raised his bushy eyebrows and looked round the room as if expecting to find her there. "We don't see so much of her as we used."

"I met her this afternoon," said Kenneth. "She was on her way to Wrottle End with a message for Lady Scrymgeour, so I walked there with her."

Joan looked at him with sudden intensity. Her first thought was for Amaryllis. She knew that that was just the kind of thing that would rouse Mrs Gore-Smythe's wrath — Mrs Gore-Smythe was so very particular, even prudish. Joan was vexed, and longed to say so.

Then the possibility that Rodwell cared for Amaryllis flashed into her mind, and excited her. Did he? Did he indeed? She half believed that he did. And Amaryllis? Did she care too? And oh, they were nice enough for each other! But Mrs Gore-Smythe! What *would* she say?

It had not occurred to Kenneth Rodwell that he was likely to fall in love with Amaryllis until the thing had actually happened, and on the morning following this conversation he suddenly came face to face with the accumulated evidence of the past few weeks, and realised all it meant.

He was alone in the play-room, sitting before the piano.

For a long time he remained silently thinking of Amaryllis, of her quaint face, her pretty laugh, and her quick, eager ways. It troubled him that she should be unhappy, that any one should scold her. He recalled the time that they had spent together, and innumerable things that she had said. Recollecting the doctor's theory that what was of importance was what people took for granted, he applied it to her, and he realised that on many questions they started from the same point. She was democratic, and she was unworldly, and though she believed in her religion and he did not, yet he felt that to be no barrier between them. Indeed, he envied her her faith, even as he envied the Lloyds theirs. He would not have loved her so well had she been without it.

But he had no right to ask her to marry him! No right to ask her to share such a life as he led! No right to ask her to put her theories in practice! She was too young to know what it meant. No! He had no right to ask her, and he never would.

Good God! He never would!

Then, suddenly, he mocked his own pain.

Solemnly he began to play the scale of C minor

from the bottom of the piano to the top. The broken-hearted lover was a new part for him to perform, and he thought he was performing it very nicely. And slow music always added to the effect!

He finished the scale, and began to play "Two lovely Black Eyes," with immense expression.

In three weeks he would have got over it, and she would have forgotten his existence.

Would she?

He forgot to go on with the tune, and after half-consciously feeling about through various harmonies he began to play the slow movement of the "Appassionata."

Did she care? He recalled every look, every tone of her voice. She liked him. Oh yes! She was glad to see him, to talk to him—she was interested in the discussions that rose between them, even to the point of getting angry with him. But did she care?

He did not know.

Absurdity! Of course she did not! Why should she? He suddenly rattled off a polka.

Of course his feeling for her was transitory! Whoever heard of love that lasted! That was only one of the conventionally sentimental ideas, which in his heart of hearts he gloated over! Of course, he felt ready to protest that his constancy would be eternal.

He sighed. Why did they scold her? That was what bothered him. The polka came to an abrupt end, as he puzzled over the problem.

He thought of Mrs Gore-Smythe, frowning with the effort to explain her severity. He recollected that she was cold and forbidding in her manner to him. Yet she was pretty and smiling to most people. He had never thought about her attitude to him before. Then he remembered the doctor's remark that they saw less of Amaryllis, and the suspicion

dawned upon him that perhaps Mrs Gore-Smythe was afraid that he might fall in love with her daughter.

And reasonably! He acknowledged that. Yes, that explained her manner to him. But why did she scold Amaryllis? He could not understand it.

Well, what was to be done next?

"I must go," he thought despondently. "I've got to clear out."

Aha! The properly heroic attitude! He struck up Chopin's "Funeral March" with great pomp.

If he could not ask her to marry him, he must go. He divined that his love for her must either afflict her or awaken an answering love in her, and therefore he must go.

His playing lost the mockery with which he had begun the March, and the melody in it was poignant under his touch with a reality of feeling. He must go. But without seeing her? Without saying good-bye? Without explaining? No! To go without word would be the cruel, senseless self-sacrifice of a novel's hero. Even if she did not love him, she was his friend. It was due to their friendship that he should at least say good-bye. And supposing she showed any signs of caring? Why, then he would explain. He felt convinced that she could not care enough to put his views of life into practice, but why should she have the pain of thinking that he had trifled with her?

Rot! The scoffing demon rose in him again. All very fine! He only wanted the credit of what he was doing. He sneered at himself, and then suddenly acknowledged the partial truth of the accusation with real humility. Perhaps he did want the credit. It would be a small, a very small consolation. But even so, the other motive, the desire that she should feel no bitterness, was there too.

He could not leave the thing undone, because his motive was mixed.

He braced himself, and attacked a fugue of Bach's with business-like agility and emphasis.

A few moments later Joan came into the room from the garden.

"Are you under the impression that you have been practising?" she asked.

"I have been choosing select pieces for a variety entertainment," he said.

He ended the fugue with a couple of chords, and twisted round on the music-stool.

"Joan, I say, I'm awfully sorry, but I've got to go!"

"O Kenneth!" she cried, "not really?"

"Really this time," he replied. "No appeal, unfortunately."

CHAPTER VIII

THAT same afternoon Kenneth Rodwell called at "The Limes." There was no one in the drawing-room when he was shown in, and he glanced round a little disconsolately. It was an uncomfortably pretty room; the furniture was delicate both in colour and design, giving him a general impression of pink and white, and making him feel not only that an ordinary man in ordinary clothes was clumsy and out of place, but that any sort of genuine emotion was crude.

He went to the open window and looked out. The day was still and damp, with grey, melancholy skies. There were quantities of dahlias and chrysanthemums in the garden, but their petals were falling and their leaves discoloured.

While he was waiting the maid entered and lit the fire, and went out again.

Kenneth left the window, and came to stand opposite the hearth, watching the flame spread through the paper, while the wood crackled and shifted under the layer of black, cold coal.

He was bothered by the discovery that he had no idea of what he was going to say to Amaryllis. His mind was quite empty, and yet he could feel his heart beating, and his hands were cold and moist.

Hearing the door open he turned round impetuously, eager to see her, but it was Henrietta who entered, as beautifully clad in close-fitting mauve cloth, and as artificial with elaborately-dressed hair as the room required. She came towards him without a smile and with the merest inclination of her fair head.

"How do you do, Mr Rodwell?" she said coldly. "I heard that you had asked for my daughter, and as she is resting, I thought I would come myself and ask you to excuse her."

But Kenneth felt that all the world depended on his seeing Amaryllis. He was not going to propose to her, but he wanted her to know exactly how the matter stood. He wanted her to know that he loved her, and that he refrained from asking her to live his life, because it was a life of unconventional poverty and erratic habits. He did not stop to consider why he wanted her to know this. He scarcely realised himself that besides a passionate desire that she should not misjudge him, he was moved by vague, unexpressed hopes. If she knew, if she understood, it would then rest with her to judge for herself.

His first thought was to reassure Mrs Gore-Smythe by telling her of his intended departure.

"I am going away," he said. "I have come to say good-bye."

"Indeed," said Mrs Gore-Smythe, not at all reassured. What if he were going away? Why should he come and announce the fact to Amaryllis? Why should he make a point of saying good-bye to her? Indeed it was high time he did go away.

Kenneth perceived that she intended to yield in nothing, and a spirit of opposition rose in him.

"If I called later——" he began.

"I'm sorry," said Henrietta, "but my daughter and I are both going out."

"Perhaps to-morrow?" he suggested.

"To-morrow she will be engaged all day," replied Mrs Gore-Smythe.

Her manner roused the devil in him.

"You mean," he said deliberately, "that you do not wish me to see her. But, Mrs Gore-Smythe, I——"

Henrietta interrupted him angrily. Plain-speaking

revolted her at all times, but under the circumstances it was nothing less than insolent.

"Mr Rodwell!" she cried, but at that moment the door opened and old Lady Scrymgeour was announced.

They both turned round so quickly, and Henrietta greeted her with a promptness that was so nearly asperity, that Lady Scrymgeour guessed the situation. Her eyes gleamed with relish and with curiosity.

As soon as she entered, Kenneth felt that it was useless to stay longer, and with bitterness in his heart he waited till she had shaken hands with Mrs Gore-Smythe in order to take his leave. But Lady Scrymgeour, suspecting his intention, turned towards him.

"I was wanting to see *you*," she remarked with a nod. "So you are going away? What are you doing that for? Just when we had got used to having you about."

"Do sit down, Lady Scrymgeour," urged Henrietta, politely pushing forward an armchair.

"How did you hear?" asked Kenneth, surprised that the old lady should know his plans already.

"Just been to see Joan about the concert for the District Nurses' Fund," she said, taking the chair offered her. "I was counting on your help too. I am provoked with you, Mr Rodwell."

"I'm afraid——" he said, and then the door once more opened and Amaryllis herself came in.

"Bless me! Here she is!" ejaculated Lady Scrymgeour under her breath. "And she didn't know he was here!" she observed.

Henrietta's first feeling was that it was all right so long as they were all present; her next was dread lest Amaryllis should show emotion when she heard that Kenneth was returning to London. She still remained standing, intending that he should take his leave. But Kenneth had no intention of going now

Amaryllis was there. He could think of nothing but that there she was. He had been told that he should not see her, and there she was!

Amaryllis hesitated for a second. She was obviously both surprised and glad to find them there, and equally obviously unconscious of any crisis. She went to greet Lady Scrymgeour and then turned to Kenneth.

"I had no idea you were here," she said, and her tone revealed to her mother how far the intimacy she feared had advanced between them.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said, gazing at her.

"Good-bye?" she echoed. "Are you going away?"

"Yes," he said, "I am going back to town to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she cried quickly, and then stopped.

"Dear child," said Henrietta, "will you see to the fire?"

Amaryllis crossed to the hearth, and, kneeling down, knocked the fire together with the poker.

"Pray, is it work that is depriving us of your presence?" enquired Lady Scrymgeour, and Kenneth sat down near her.

"No," he said, watching Amaryllis, who was now putting on coals piece by piece with the small brass tongs. "I never work unless I want to, and I never want to, unless I'm stony broke."

"But, good gracious!" cried the old lady, "that sounds very uncomfortable. Why, you can't ever know where you are!"

"On the contrary, that's the only thing I do know," he said, "and I'm always quite sure of that."

Amaryllis was about to get up from her knees, but Henrietta, who had taken a seat by the fireplace, held out her hand with a little friendly smile. The girl was surprised and gratified by the unwonted tenderness, and putting her hand in her mother's she remained where she was, sitting on her heels.

"When is the concert to be?" asked Henrietta, ignoring Kenneth.

"The 25th," replied Lady Scrymgeour. "You will play something, Amaryllis?"

"I?" she cried, startled, and glanced apologetically towards Kenneth. She did not like him to hear that she was expected to perform in public, even in a village for charity; she knew sufficiently well the difference between professional and amateur playing.

Henrietta saw the glance, and resented it.

"Of course Amaryllis will be delighted to do anything to help," she said. "Won't you, darling?"

Again the caress of her voice was pleasant to the daughter after the constant reproofs of the past weeks.

"Couldn't you put off your departure, Mr Rodwell?" said Lady Scrymgeour. "Or come back for the concert? Couldn't you do that?"

Simultaneously, with a sudden eager hope that he would say yes, Amaryllis felt her mother's clasp tighten on her hand. She realised that she was being held captive; but her captivity was also a refuge from emotions that vaguely alarmed her.

"I'm afraid not," he replied. "I *must* go back."

"H'm," said Lady Scrimgeour, displeased. "I suppose you are a socialist," she added irrelevantly.

"I? Oh no! On the contrary," he replied, "the very essence of Socialism is regularity, and my whole philosophy of life lies in the absence of all habits, and of everything that can form a habit."

"Bless me! But I thought the whole point of Socialism was that every one would do as they liked and what nobody else liked," cried the old lady. "Didn't you think so?" she asked Henrietta.

"My husband always says that the conventions of social life have their basis on fundamental reasons," remarked Henrietta, still disregarding Kenneth and addressing Lady Scrymgeour. "It is only the very

young, or people who judge things superficially, who want to behave differently from every one else."

"You hear that, Mr Rodwell?" exclaimed Lady Scrymgeour in mischievous delight. "What you want is a good sensible wife—some one who would know how to help you on in your career. I'll choose her for you."

A mist blurred Kenneth's sight for a second. It was as if she had put her finger on a wound that sent thrills of pain all over him.

But the next minute he had recovered, and he replied to her, speaking at Amaryllis:

"It's very good of you, but——"

"But what?" retorted Lady Scrymgeour. "There's no but about it."

"Well, but there *is*," he persisted. "Would any wife put up with my views of life?"

"Bless me, no! That's just why you must marry. A wife would soon get you out of such ideas."

"Lady Scrymgeour, can you tell me——" began Henrietta, but the old lady would not listen.

"You and my nephew Ernest are a fine pair!" she snorted.

"But I—I'm afraid my views are me," he said, looking intently at Amaryllis. "And they mean liberty to those who like them," he pleaded.

Henrietta again tightened her hold on her child's hand. She had not meant to speak directly to Kenneth at all, but she could not restrain herself.

"And such views mean slavery if one doesn't like them," she said. "In any case, marriage, whatever any one may say, is bondage. Under some circumstances it is happy bondage, but bondage it always is, especially for the wife. Don't you agree, Lady Scrymgeour?"

Amaryllis understood that the contest had sharpened between her mother and Kenneth Rodwell. Also she

understood what it was about. Her brain perceived quite dispassionately what they each of them wished her to feel, and her clear-sightedness somehow prevented her from feeling anything at all. As she knelt on the hearth-rug, looking on in silence, she had a curious sensation of being both in the heart of the fray and yet aloof from it.

"That is why I fear I must refuse Lady Scrymgeour's offer," said Kenneth. "There's no hope for me, unless, of course, I advertised in the *Matrimonial Post*: 'Wanted, a wife warranted to be content with tunes and twopence-halfpenny.'"

"Well, you could at least be sure of the unconvencionality of the applicants," remarked Lady Scrymgeour drily.

Henrietta pinched her lips.

"And you leave Hadbury to-morrow, Mr Rodwell?" she said, with an air of bringing the conversation to an end.

"Yes," he said, rising, "I go to-morrow."

She also rose, and Amaryllis scrambled to her feet

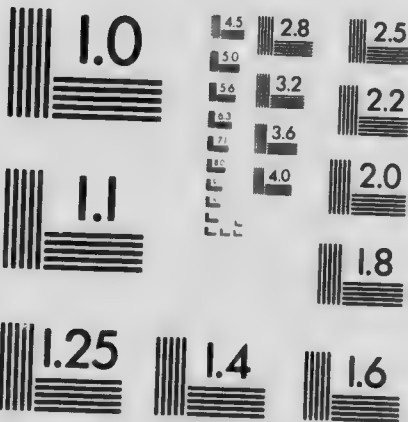
"Good-bye," said Henrietta coldly.

"Good-bye," he said, and then took leave of Lady Scrymgeour. As he turned towards Amaryllis, the old lady suddenly began to talk about the coming concert, diverting Henrietta's attention to herself. In that moment Amaryllis placed her hand in his, and raised her eyes to his face in a hasty, frightened, questioning look. In reply, he lifted her fingers to his lips.



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CHAPTER IX

HENRIETTA felt that for the second time she had got rid of an influence that came between her and her child. In the first instance, though Miss Stirling's departure had removed a barrier, her influence had been purely educational and preparatory. But now, Henrietta had fought against an interloper who had threatened to oust her. She had opposed him, and he had gone. She plumed herself on her victory. Once more the ground was clear for confidence and companionship between her and Amaryllis. To be sure, she was a little uncertain as to whether she had not sustained some losses in the contest. The part that Lady Scrymgeour had played in it made her uneasy. How far had she understood? How far had the aptness of her conversation been accidental? Henrietta's judgment was baffled, but in any case her ire was hot against the old woman.

However, Mrs Gore-Smythe had no fear that any lasting impression had been made on Amaryllis. With her usual optimism she had faith in her own influence over the girl, and she attributed to Rodwell everything that had been amiss during the past weeks.

She took Amaryllis out to pay a distant call after Lady Scrymgeour had gone, and on their return before taking off her hat, she went to the study and gave an account of what had happened to Frank.

"Good heavens! You should have sent for me!" he exclaimed.

"So I should, if Lady Scrymgeour had not come in,

replied Henrietta. "How I do dislike her, Frank! I wonder how Amy can stand her?"

Amongst themselves the Gore-Smythes generally referred to the younger Lady Scrymgeour by her Christian name to distinguish her from her mother-in-law.

"I would have dealt with him!" said Frank, still thinking of Rodwell.

"Sir Roger is far more like his mother than his grandmother," continued Henrietta thoughtfully. "I think we'll ask him to dinner, Frank. And one or two other young people. It will distract the child's mind a little."

"Certainly, dearest," replied Mr Gore-Smythe. "By all means."

They were both silent for a minute, then their eyes met in a look of mutual comprehension.

"We couldn't wish for anything better than that," said Frank, smiling.

Henrietta laughed, and sighed, and laughed again.

"It's not impossible," she said.

She took up her gloves, which were lying stiffly, as she had stretched them, across her knees, and rose to go.

"I suppose," said Frank slowly, "she has—er—no real feeling for this young Rodwell—nothing serious?"

"Oh no! I don't think so," said Henrietta, shaking her head. "I daresay she is interested in him—in fact, I know she is—but it is nothing more than a passing fancy. I *was* a little anxious this afternoon to see how she'd take it when she heard he was going away. But—well, after all, you know she's very young."

"It's been an unfortunate incident," said Mr Gore-Smythe sourly.

Henrietta looked anxious.

"You mean——"

"It's done her no good," he continued. "I see it in many little ways. You must keep a tight hand over her, Henrietta."

"She behaved very nicely this afternoon," replied his wife, a little doubtfully. "I don't think this is the moment to be strict with her."

Frank pondered the question gravely.

"No, you're right," he agreed. "You're quite right. This is not the moment for severity."

That evening Frank and Henrietta were very kind to Amaryllis. The respite from small, harassing reproofs was soothing to her. She was thankful for it, but otherwise their unwonted amiability left her cool and unmoved. Indeed, its principal effect was to emphasise a sense of eventfulness. The consciousness that something had happened oppressed and exalted her throughout the evening to the exclusion of all other emotions, and their attitude towards her gave her the impression that they also recognised this.

When she went to her room that night she undressed quickly, and her hair hanging down in a pig-tail over her loose pink dressing-gown, she knelt down by her bedside to say her prayers. But the very effort to concentrate her attention gave coherence to her experiences of the day, and she knelt there quite still, her hands pressed against her forehead, intending to pray, but thinking instead.

Was it possible that he liked her? It seemed so astonishing! So impossible! And yet—she had asked him *everything* in one frightened look, and he had answered in a way she could not mistake. She lived again that moment of parting! She still felt the touch of his lips on her hair!

She trembled, because she was convinced it was true; and it was so astonishing!

Why had she asked him like that? She did not know. It had been an impulse that had taken her unawares.

She had guessed it while he was talking to Lady Scrymgeour, but she had not been certain, and some-

how she had been quite indifferent then, not even surprised. Yet she had minded dreadfully when he had first said he was going away, but afterwards anything she had felt had been absorbed by the interest with which she was paying attention. And indeed now—at this moment—she was more excited than anything else.

Of course she was sorry he was going away; very, very sorry! It would make a dreadful difference to her! Indeed, she felt with a half-angry impatience that she wished that everything might have remained unchanged—just as it had been a week ago.

But then a week ago, yesterday even, she was in constant petty disgrace with her father and mother, while this evening nothing she had done had been found fault with. She could not help perceiving that this immunity coincided with Rodwell's departure, and she suddenly doubted the moral force of their reproaches. When she was scolded for allowing him to accompany her part of her way, if they met by chance, was it not rather because he was he, and not because the action was intrinsically wrong? And when her parents were scandalised by the drift of her questions concerning social right and wrong, and the relations of the classes and suchlike, was it not partly because they suspected such ideas to be his?

And so they were, up to a certain point, both his and Dr Lloyd's too. But as his opinions differed from Dr Lloyd's, so she was conscious that hers, too, were individual. However small her capacity, however ignorant and inexperienced she might be, yet she claimed something indisputably her own, in her own point of view. She perceived that she had not achieved more than to question, but she had learnt to question passionately, swiftly, and sensitively, and in questioning, to divine ever wider and wider horizons.

She looked back upon herself as she had been when Miss Stirling had left. Since then, she had changed ; she had developed ; and her consciousness of her vitality, mental and moral, excited her still further. Curiously enough, she, too, found a similarity in the present moment to the time of Miss Stirling's departure. But the similarity she discovered was in her frame of mind, and not in the circumstances nor in her relations to her mother. Once again, she had the sensation of opening her eyes upon a new world. Once again, she was thrilled with the possibilities of life. Her mental attitude was the same, but the possibilities had approached nearer, had become more defined, more real.

Suddenly she recollected that she was not praying, and her conscience pricked her. She tried to collect her attention, but the next moment her thoughts were absorbed as before.

She wondered why her mother was so antagonistic to him. And then it occurred to her that he himself seemed to acknowledge the reasonableness of Mrs Gore-Smythe's objections. For what he had said amounted to telling her that he would not ask her to marry him because she could not be happy in the life he led.

She wondered—oh, she wondered so much!—what would such a life be like? Was she really unfitted for it? She had been so ready to question the morality of wealth, even of a moderate income; she had been so impatient of conventional standards; but she had argued from the safe position of being *unable* to make any change in her own surroundings. What would it mean to live as he did? She could not tell! She could not tell! She felt small and cowardly, and doubtful of herself.

But if he had asked her . . . ? Her brain swam with sudden agitation; she held her breath, and it

seemed to her that her heart had stopped beating. Supposing he had asked her?

She dared not think further, and she started to her feet.

But she had not said her prayers.

She stood still in the middle of the room, with a troubled look on her face.

"It's no good," she thought, "I can't to-night, I simply can't. O God, forgive me!"

And she scrambled into bed, and blew out her candle.

She lay down, pulled the bed-clothes close up to her chin, and stared with wide-open eyes into the dark.

Why did her mother say marriage was bondage?

"It might be happy bondage," she had said, "but bondage it was, especially for the woman." And her mother *knew*. Amaryllis remembered what Mrs Gore-Smythe had said about her first marriage, and she felt that strange, undefined dangers beset life. Of course, her mother was afraid that something of the same sort might happen to her. In spite of her belief in Kenneth, she regarded her mother's past sorrowful experiences with reverent awe, and she acknowledged that respect was due to her opposition.

She thought of Henrietta's gentleness to her that afternoon, of the protective tightening of her grasp, and she longed to talk to her, to ask her—oh, a hundred things!

She wondered how one would feel if one were married to somebody one did not like.

It would be horrible, unendurable! She could never have borne it as her mother had borne it! Never! She recalled with admiration Henrietta's reply when she had bluntly asked her mother if she had been glad when death brought her liberty. Indeed, her mother was truly magnanimous.

If only she would not suspect Kenneth Rodwell! If only she really knew him! If she could see him with the Lloyds, for instance, when he just said out anything and everything that came into his head! He was so funny, and so charming, and so disinterested! Her heart sank at the thought that he was going away, that she would not see him again for weeks.

She never doubted that she *would* see him again. She felt confident that he would come back. . . .

Her thoughts faded into the misty comfort of approaching sleep, and her eyes closed.

CHAPTER X

MUCH to the gratification of Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe, and to the surprise of every one else, Sir Roger Scrymgeour did fall in love with Amaryllis.

Sir Roger was the Conservative member for that district. Loyalty to his country, to say nothing of a combative ardour, a love of horses, and skill in the handling of weapons, would naturally have led him in his boyhood to choose the Army for a profession, but face to face with the fact that he was his mother's only son, and that the next heir, his cousin, Ernest Scrymgeour, was an eccentric dreamer totally unfitted to look after an estate, he decided that he had no right to follow his inclinations in this respect. Upon all such questions he and his mother were in absolute sympathy, and had it been only his consideration for her that deterred him, she would unhesitatingly have sacrificed herself, both for his sake, and because she believed that the noblest way of serving one's country was to fight for her. Roger knew that she understood the wrench it cost him, while she approved his scrupulous attention to his duty.

Of course, life at Wrottle End was jolly well all right. There was good shooting and hunting, and —well, looking after the estate was all right too. He was jolly proud of it! Every one said it was one of the best-managed properties in the county, and he meant to keep it at that. It was only when one came to compare the life with a soldier's — oh well, no other life was *in it*, really!

As he grew older, his regret, though never completely quelled, diminished in proportion as his interest in his position and its occupations became more and more confirmed. Then presently, as he realised that socialistic and radical ideas were threatening his place in the established order of things, that place became of the first importance to him, and he was prompt to defend his rights. If he could not fight against the foreign foes of his country, he could at least oppose those who attacked her institutions from within. He stood for Parliament in 1895, and was elected by a large majority.

In appearance, he was like his mother, tall, well-built, and with the same indefinable air of distinction. His face was narrow, the modelling hard and clear. The nose, which was rather low between his bright blue eyes, rose abruptly into a little hump, thence continuing firm and straight to the nostrils. A wave was visible in his brown hair, though he kept it closely cropped. He was clean-shaven, and his mouth, though in shape it was, as his grandmother remarked, "just a reasonable aperture," was also something more by reason of its flexibility and sweetness of expression. He had a boyish gaiety and charm of manner peculiarly his own. His courtesy was unfailing and spontaneous, of a kind that seemed always born of the intercourse of the moment, and especially adapted to the person he was addressing. From time to time there would be a scarcely perceptible hesitation in his speech, when he would flash a glance out of his blue eyes that took his listener into fellowship with him to admire, laugh or abuse, in a way that was irresistible and disarmed all criticism. Everybody liked him; the most Radical of his tenants was obliged to own that Sir Roger had "a way with him." All the ladies of the neighbourhood were enthusiastic about his delightful

manners, and Mr Gore-Symthe, who always enjoyed a chat with Scrymgeour, never discovered that Sir Roger was quite without any literary or artistic perceptions. As a matter of fact, he read only for information or for the excitement of the story, and though he loved his beautiful Elizabethan home, and was aware of a certain harmony in the miscellaneous collection of furniture that had accumulated there, his pleasure in it arose from association, and not from any natural appreciation of beauty. He had been born there; he had lived there all his life, and he would not willingly have suffered the alteration of the smallest detail. He admired the portraits of his ancestors; it never occurred to him that there could be a second opinion about them. He also admired his mother immensely, feeling that she was in keeping with her surroundings. He liked to see her tall figure in a long black gown, crossing the gallery, descending the old staircase one hand on the balustrade, or moving about the lofty rooms. He liked to see her at the foot of the table at dinner; he liked to see her arranging flowers in the drawing-room, or her skirt hitched up and loose, earthy gloves on her hands, busy in the greenhouse.

"My mother is a very wonderful woman," he remarked one day to old Lady Scrymgeour.

"She's a very obstinate one," retorted his grandmother.

Sir Roger's eyes twinkled.

"I say," he remarked, "is it the cook, or the tulips, or the gardener's daughter's baby? And supposing I remark to mother—quite casually, you know—that you are a wonderful woman, which you are——"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense!" cried the old lady.

"Will she make the same uncompromising reply?" he continued.

"No; of course she won't," said Lady Scrymgeour.

"She's too much self-control, and she's got principles against calling any one anything. Besides, it wouldn't be true, for I've given in. But you're quite right, Roger. I told your father that she was a wonderful woman before he met her; afterwards he told it to me. And so we shall go on to the end of the chapter, telling it to each other. The only pity is that she herself can't join in the chorus. I'm sure she'd like to, but it would be against her principles again."

Sir Roger laughed delightedly.

"Go it, grandmamma!" he cried. "But I wish you'd tell me what it's all about."

"I shan't do anything of the sort," she replied tartly. "Why don't you marry, Roger? Your father had married long before he was your age," she added abruptly.

"Why, hang it all, it's twice as difficult for me to choose a wife as it was for him," he said. "He had only you to set his standard by—a high one, to be sure, but only one! Whereas I not only have you, but my mother too, and how the devil am I to find any one who will come up to the two of you?"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the old lady.

"Well, but seriously," he went on, "you see she must be pretty—I insist on that. Then she must be able to discriminate between weeds and vegetables and flowers in their elementary state, and understand everything about a trowel. She must have opinions about the gardener's daughter's baby—that's very important—and she must be able to discuss the arrangement of plaits and gores and gimp. Added to all this, she must be obstinate——"

"Roger! Will you be quiet!" cried Lady Scrymgeour, rapping on the floor with her stick.

Few people guessed that under his gay, courteous, gentle exterior, primitive instincts were strong in Sir Roger. Not only was he capable of inexorable

resentment, but according to his code it would be ridiculous and contemptible to forgive an injury that one *mind*ed. Fighting was his ideal of a man's profession ; next to that, shooting and hunting ranked as occupations, while any other form of physical activity, such as riding, cricket, golf, etc., could give him the satisfied sense of having achieved something which a whole morning spent on his accounts or reading a parliamentary pamphlet could not produce.

Finally, when he fell in love, he did so with headlong vehemence.

When Amaryllis first came out he hardly noticed her. He was too much accustomed to pretty, well-mannered young women to pay much heed to the event of another one growing up and joining the throng. And Amaryllis had given as little attention to him. He was some fifteen years older than herself, and she took him for granted as a person who had been grown up as long as she remembered him. They met sufficiently often, and were accustomed to an indifferent and casual intercourse, but the first awakening of any particular mutual interest was the result of a chance meeting one day early in the following January. It was a still, cloudy morning and unusually warm. Mr Roger had been to the cottage of one of his game-keepers to rate him for a piece of negligence, and was returning home across the park. As he approached the beech avenue he saw a slim girl, whom he recognised as Amaryllis Gore-Smythe, also going towards Wrottle End. He was amused to see that she was walking where the road sloped down towards the grass, and was shuffling her feet in the thick deposit of dead leaves. Her skirt and fur jacket were two shades of a ruddy brown. She was wearing a close-fitting fur cap, and the shape of her small head was as clearly defined as if it were uncovered ; she held it slightly

bent forward, in order to watch the commotion that her feet were making.

Sir Roger quickened his pace and overtook her, but the rustle of the leaves prevented her from hearing his steps behind her.

"I can do that better than you," he said.

She stopped and turned round quickly, and he shuffled through the leaves towards her, proving that he could make a bigger disturbance than she could.

"It's largely a question of boots," she said.

"Don't you mean it's a question of large boots?" he enquired.

She laughed, with a surprised feeling of friendliness towards him. Having unconsciously regarded him as in a different category to herself, partly because of his dignity as a Member of Parliament, partly because he was so much older than herself, she now found it astonishing, diverting, and a little flattering to meet him on terms of equality.

"Aren't the leaves thick here?" she exclaimed. "I should like to walk through them with bare feet."

"*Would* you?" he said, suddenly fixing his bright blue eyes upon her, and opening them wide. "How about slugs?"

She laughed again, and they began to walk on together.

"Life must have been much more fun when we didn't mind slugs," she said.

"Was there ever such a time?" he asked.

"Oh yes!" cried Amaryllis. "When people lived in trees, and had no particular houses or clothes."

"Am I to understand, then, that at heart you are"—he flashed a look at her—"an early Briton."

"I don't think I'm *early*," she replied. "I'm present-day, but I'm *low*."

She spoke with such conviction that he laughed

aloud, but before he could reply, she changed the subject. Standing still, she said :

"I've brought a note for Lady Scrymgeour from mother, but perhaps—may I give it to you? I don't think there is an answer; at least, not one that I can take back with me."

"Oh, but now you have come so far you must come in and rest!" he cried. "You will stay and have lunch? My mother would never forgive me if I let you go back like that."

"But they are expecting me at home," said Amaryllis.

"Surely they would guess that we had kept you?"

Amaryllis held out the note to him.

"Please take it," she said; "I must go back."

"Well, now, but do consider!" he said. "You are wounding my spirit of hospitality—you are indeed! See where we are! Actually in sight of the front door, and you refuse to come in."

Amaryllis was troubled; she did not like to tell him that she was afraid of his mother, and that any meal at Wrottle End was an ordeal that reduced her to speechless misery.

"I'm so sorry," she said, lifting shy eyes to his face; "but I must go home."

He really wished her to stay. His interest in her had been quickening; she was unlike other people; she was quaint, amusing—yes, and charming.

"Well," he said reluctantly, "I suppose we must put up with it, but you must let me show you the way through the garden; it is much shorter, and it is rather pretty, too, even at this time of year. We can leave the note as we pass through the house."

She submitted to this arrangement.

Sir Roger opened the front door for her to pass in to the great hall. To the left the door into the dining-room stood open, and she caught sight of a footman preparing the table for lunch. Sir Roger gave him

a peremptory call, ordered him to deliver the note, and they passed on into an oak-panelled passage leading to the garden. Amaryllis was impressed by the romantic grandeur of the old house; she was impressed, but she was also a little antagonistic. It was brought home to her that Sir Roger was the master of all this, and the outcome of it; his heritage had made him what he was, and it typified what he thought.

Amaryllis had a sudden desire to mark the separation between herself and him beyond all mistake.

"In spite of what you say," she remarked abruptly, "my tastes *are* low. I would far rather eat bread and cheese in a ditch, than have a sumptuous dinner in a beautiful room, with servants to wait on me."

"But . . ." he exclaimed, with an air of delighted discovery. "But . . . nothing is easier! Will you have lunch with me now? I could easily get some bread and cheese, and there is a very nice ditch in the shrubbery . . . really very nice! It's not too moist, and there is only a reasonable supply of brambles."

"Oh, I didn't mean now, though I should like to!" cried Amaryllis, with her gay little laugh. "And I don't mean just once, for fun, but *always*. I don't like all the paraphernalia of detail that belongs to everyday life."

"Ah, but do you know, I do like it," he replied. "and I think there is a great deal to be said for it."

"Details are so prosaic," she said.

"I quite agree that all these modern appliances and complications tend to make life hideous," he replied. "All these contrivances for making money and saving time are repulsive, and to my mind have nothing to do with real progress. But I do like time-honoured customs. After all, it means a good deal when one says 'time-honoured.'"

"Isn't it often applied to some privilege that people do not want to give up or share?" she suggested.

"Well, and why not? Such privileges are often as much a part of our inheritance as anything else," he said, pushing open the gate into the shrubbery. "And why should what is our own be taken from us? Hang it all, you know, you might just as well say that we are not to profit by the experience of those who have lived before us!"

"But that doesn't get over the difficulty that some people have privileges and some have not," said Amaryllis.

He regarded her with mock alarm.

"Upon my honour, I believe you're a socialist!" he exclaimed. "Why, I had no idea I was in such dangerous company. I suppose, then, you don't dislike the mark of the populace upon the times, however unsightly it may be?"

"I suppose, really, there is poetry in everything," said Amaryllis doubtfully, "if only one can forget the aspect, and keep the meaning before one's mind."

"May I suggest that that last remark seems to contradict what you were saying a few minutes ago?" said Sir Roger.

"Does it?" said Amaryllis, unconcerned. "Oh well, I hold both opinions, so it doesn't matter."

CHAPTER XI

THROUGHOUT that year Henrietta and Frank watched the growing intimacy between Sir Roger and Amaryllis with feverish interest, but the idea that he could fall in love with the daughter of Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe never occurred to the two Lady Scrymgeours. Of course they both expected that he would marry—indeed, his delay in doing so was a source of considerable vexation to them—but they had every confidence in his sense of fitness, and certainly no one in the immediate neighbourhood of Wrottle could be considered a suitable wife for him.

Shortly after their encounter in the park the meeting of Parliament interrupted the relations between Sir Roger and Amaryllis, and during the next few months they met very seldom. However, the few occasions when they saw each other helped to preserve a certain habit of friendliness between them, and when in the following August Sir Roger was once more at Wrottle End, their acquaintance had developed, apparently through the mere lapse of time.

It was a long time before it dawned upon Amaryllis herself that Sir Roger felt anything more for her than she did for him. Her own attitude towards him was unconsciously influenced by her friendship with Kenneth Rodwell. Sir Roger represented a contrary point of view, and face to face with him, she was always spurred on to dispute those doctrines which he held to be indisputable. His innate belief that no one could honestly hold another view roused her loyal

not only to Kenneth and Dr Lloyd, but to her own ideas in so far as they were her own.

But she felt Sir Roger's charm more than she quite realised. He met her arguments with a mixture of earnestness and chaff that stimulated her to laughter and to a gentle audacity, giving her an exhilarating consciousness of being at her best with him. She was far more definite than she had been in her intercourse with Kenneth. Then she had been timid, just because she was disposed to believe that the general tenor of what he said was true. She had been afraid of dislodging the opinions to which she had been brought up, while she was uncertain how far these unfamiliar yet acceptable ideas might lead her. But contact with opinions which awoke no disquieting assent in her conscience had the effect of confirming her in the ideas to which she was gradually becoming accustomed, and she experienced a new sense of enjoyment in the growing vigour of her beliefs. Sometimes, in the excitement of feeling certain, she attacked Sir Roger boldly.

"Why don't you bring in a bill for the preservation of hard and fast lines!" she cried one day—"Fast lines to protect the aristocrat, and hard lines on all the rest!"

"Well, at least one would then learn where to draw the line," replied Sir Roger coolly.

He delighted in chaffing her. He looked upon her socialistic theories as the result of a youthful generosity, combined with unusual intelligence. That she should have arrived at wrong conclusions did not matter, because she was a woman, and he took no woman's opinions upon general topics seriously. Not that he underrated women! Far from it. He had a profound reverence for them, and for the all-importance and scope of their action in the community. A woman's influence was immeasurable for good or evil, but however wise she might be in the

direction of her own life and the lives of those that came into immediate contact with her, he could not feel that her judgments upon generalities and public matters had any value, except as they indicated, or reacted upon, her own character. Consequently, Amaryllis's mental excursions caused him no apprehensions. He was confident that once she was mistress of a household and the mother of children her energies would be satisfied by their natural outlet.

But Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe were seriously concerned at Amaryllis's independent spirit. She ought not to be so outspoken, to say the least of it! It was a great mistake. Indeed, it was a very real affliction that their only child, whom they had brought up with such care, should be perverted to such extravagant folly, but it made matters infinitely worse to think that she might be imperilling her chances of a good marriage by blurting out her thoughts regardless of who might be listening. They had no certain knowledge of what Sir Roger felt about the matter and to be sure, he seemed to encourage her, but they greatly feared that she *only* amused him.

In their anxiety they took Amaryllis to task, and reproved her whenever she was betrayed into eager speech. She was told that she was self-assertive and forward, that she made herself ridiculous, that she was wrong-headed, that her opinions were founded on fallacies. By degrees, the lectures became more solemn, and it was demonstrated that she would not have accepted such ideas without some moral obliquity in her character; it was a great grief to her parents that she should fall so far short of their standard of a good and refined woman. Presently, the carping extended to details of her reading, dress and amusements, as it had done a year before when Kenneth Rodwell was a danger. The fact was, that both Henrietta and Frank experienced a deep-rooted

satisfaction in finding fault, and having once begun they found it impossible to leave off. It established their high standard of morality beyond dispute; it corroborated their sense of innate virtue; it proved their goodness to themselves by constantly recurring implication, and they expanded in the gratifying knowledge that they were doing their duty. Of course, it was very distressing to have to scold Amaryllis, but it was the truest kindness in the end; and when all was said and done, they were responsible for her development.

Incidentally, this severity helped on the friendship between Scrymgeour and Amaryllis in a way that Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe had not foreseen, for the girl soon began to feel that she could speak more freely to Sir Roger than to her own parents. She knew that nothing she could say would ever make him change his mind, and she was satisfied that it should be so; she could not help feeling that he was extraordinarily complete. But she knew also that he liked to listen to her, and that he thought it worth while to answer her! He sought her company, and he did not blame her. Though her opponent in ideas, she presently came to look upon him as her advocate against harsh criticism.

On the whole, Amaryllis believed in her parents. Certainly she believed in the purity of their motives. Once or twice, stung by what she felt to be injustice, she lost her temper in a way that recalled the violent passions of her childhood, but generally when she was told she was remiss, she believed it. It was only afterwards, when the prompt pang of repentance had subsided, and she tried to adjust her own theories of right and wrong with their precepts, that she doubted whether after all she *were* so bad. Surely, if she were she would be spontaneously conscious of wrong-doing. Was it stupidity,

then, on her part? Was it want of perception, of moral delicacy? She was quite ready to accuse herself of all these things, on the assumption that they were likely to be true of her, but as before, when the condemnation of herself implied the condemnation of those friends she loved and revered, her sense of justice asserted itself. The only explanation then left to her was that her parents were old-fashioned and rather narrow, but very good according to their tenets. Occasionally their deference to public opinion gave her a sensation of moral cramp, but she instinctively withheld her judgment upon this point.

That summer Mrs Prout came to stay with them. An ailment that had kept her an invalid for many months had prevented her visit in the preceding year, and it had not suited Henrietta to go herself to Boltons or to let Amaryllis go there. She was always a little resentful of her mother's affection for the girl.

Amaryllis looked forward eagerly to seeing her grandmother. She had confided in her from her babyhood, and she believed that she was going to confide in her again. She went to the station to meet her, and arriving too soon, she sat down and gazed along the straight, shining lines that diminished in the distance till they vanished. As the train approached she leapt up, hurriedly scanning each window, and suddenly waving as she caught sight of the small, dowdy form of the old lady stepping down from one of the carriages.

She ran towards her.

"Hooray, granny!" she cried, kissing her on both cheeks. "Hip! hip! hooray!"

"Well, Molly! How are you, child?"

As soon as they were seated in the carriage, the maid on the box, Mrs Prout turned her dull grey

spectacled eyes upon her grandchild, and investigated her.

"I haven't seen you since you put your hair up," she remarked.

"What a long time!" sighed Amaryllis. "O granny, are you quite well again?"

"As well as I shall ever be, my dear," replied Mrs Prout with brisk patience. "And how do you like being grown up?"

"Very much," said Amaryllis perfunctorily.

Mrs Prout put her hand in its loose black glove over Amaryllis's fingers, gave them a little squeeze, and then patted them.

"I don't feel sure yet that this young lady is my little Molly," she said. "I see a likeness to the little girl I used to know, but——"

"Oh, she is the same, granny!" cried Amaryllis, "just the same!"

But she was not the same, and she discovered sadly that the relations between her and her grandmother could no longer be the same. Formerly they had been playmates and comrades, but now not only had Amaryllis grown up, but the old lady was perceptibly losing her hold upon life. Her memory showed signs of failing, her interests had narrowed, and what was more, she unconsciously expected Amaryllis still to behave, think, and feel as a child. Amaryllis soon found that it was not possible to confide in her as she used. Too much explanation would be necessary to make her understand! Too much explanation? Yes; but there was so much besides that could not be explained! After all, when one came to think of it, there was nothing to tell!

She still liked to be with her grandmother. To be sure, Mrs Prout was dreary and prudish, but her faculty for imaginative games with children had endeared her to Amaryllis for all time. Also the

girl was passionately grateful for affection, and her love for her grandmother was fanned and fed by the old lady's fondness for her. She read to her, played patience with her, held her skeins of wool, and submitted to be catechised about herself.

"Molly, dear, I hope you keep up your music. It would be a pity to drop it. How long do you practise? What? You don't practise regularly? But that's not right, dear. You should set aside a fixed time every day and keep to it.

"And Molly, dear, I think it is good for young people to use their fingers. I should like you to do some sewing for the poor. You should always have some on hand. A little child's frock or pinafore, for instance—I have a very nice pattern.

"I hope you don't ever sew on Sunday, do you, Molly? You shouldn't do that, dear! I'm sorry to hear it. Very sorry indeed."

"Do you think it matters so much?" asked Amaryllis gently.

"Certainly it matters. We are told to keep the day holy."

Sometimes Mrs Prout would talk about her own youth, and Amaryllis listened with avidity to the accounts she gave of her early life. The same power that enabled her to play with children, enabled her to recount with admirable vividness in a perfectly casual manner and commonplace phrases.

Once or twice Amaryllis asked about her own mother's childhood, but Mrs Prout was rigidly silent upon that subject.

In spite of her failing faculties Mrs Prout very soon discovered that her favourite grandchild was not happy at home, and she was exceeding indignant at the severity with which she was treated.

"I don't know what you are about, Henrietta," she said angrily. "The child is as good as gold—"

I have always found her so, but you have mismanaged her from the beginning."

"My dear mother," replied Henrietta, flushing, "you must really allow me to understand my own child. You can't imagine that I have any pleasure in scolding her? It is quite true, I think she is improving, but she has been exceedingly troublesome. At one time she threatened to get quite out of hand."

"The child is unhappy," said Mrs Prout. "I don't like to see it. I don't like it at all."

"You've always wanted to spoil her," exclaimed Henrietta. "I wish you had been only half as indulgent to me. I'm sure if I had had as many opportunities for enjoying myself as Amaryllis, and a home like this, I should never have needed a word of admonishment."

This year Mrs Prout did not stay in Hertfordshire as long as usual. She was not well, and she depended upon Jessie, and Jessie, occupied with the cares of her family, found it difficult to leave home. Henrietta was always more or less of a stranger to her, and as long as she was content that she should be so, Henrietta was charming. It was only when an inarticulate but stubborn dissatisfaction moved Mrs Prout to try to re-establish the relations of mother and daughter between them that she was met by a rebuff. Mrs Prout was old and tired; she resented Mrs Gore-Smythe's amiable "company manners." She could not make out how Henrietta came to be her daughter, but since she was her daughter, she expected her to behave as such. Her disapprobation of Henrietta, which had now lain dormant for many years, was reawakened, partly because her age and health had made her captious, partly because her recollection of recent years was dim, while the past was clear in her mind.

So after a stay of about six weeks she returned to Boltons.

In the autumn of that year the South African war broke out. To the unimaginative it meant a new and exciting topic of conversation, and a certain increase of personal importance from the fact that it was real history, and that they were alive to witness it. To such as Sir Roger and his mother it was a glorious opportunity to sacrifice oneself for the rights of one's countrymen in a foreign land, and in the cause of justice and humanity! Others, the minority, protested against the mercenary interest that undermined the justice of the cause, and detracted from the glory of individual heroism. People lived their lives as usual, but the reading of the newspaper was the most important moment of the twenty-four hours, and the shadow of the war hung over every day as it passed.

Shortly after the new year, Amaryllis heard from the Lloyds that Kenneth Rodwell had volunteered.

CHAPTER XII

IT was a shock to her. During the year and a half since Kenneth had departed from Hadbury she had remained satisfied in the vague expectations that he would come back, but this suddenly rendered his return definitely remote. It brought it home to her that he had really renounced all hope of marrying her.

She was hurt at his want of confidence in her. Why had he not trusted her? Alas! alas! but he *had* trusted her, and she had not responded to his trust. He had left it to her, and she had not had the courage to act on her own initiative. She had submitted to the judgment of her parents; she had obeyed their wishes.

Then, later on, she began to doubt whether it had been deference to her parents that had interfered between her and Kenneth. If she had really cared, or rather if *he* had really cared, this indistinct situation could never have arisen. She came to accept this view passively.

About this time Amaryllis went through a period lasting some weeks when the whole of her emotional capacity seemed to have become inert. Kenneth had gone to South Africa, but she was indifferent. She had begun to recognise that Sir Roger's friendship for her was of a special kind, but the knowledge failed to touch her. She accepted this passively also, neither questioning its present significance, nor looking forward to possible developments.

Her quiescent attitude distracted Sir Roger. At first he had been tranquilly certain that she was the one woman in the world for him, and except for an occasional exciting tremor of lover-like diffidence he had been confident that he was a desirable husband. He had been brought up to think so, and the value he put upon birth, property, and a gentlemanly point of view, made such a belief natural. But the continued absence of any consciousness on her side had by degrees reduced him into a ferment of anxiety and hope, of perplexity and exasperation. Was it possible she did not see what he felt for her? He could not believe it! He could not believe that the disturbance he experienced in her presence was not obvious to her! Nor could he perceive that she had any such feeling for him. Yet if she saw and did not care, why the devil did she not send him about his business? Her kindness was too kind and not kind enough. His doubt was an ever-increasing torment to him. He could not guess at her mood and had it been explained to him, he would not have understood.

One afternoon early in March he came to an abrupt decision. He must put an end to this uncertainty. He could bear it no longer. He left the House a little after five o'clock, in the middle of a debate. He would catch the six o'clock fast train to Hadbury, arriving at 6.30. He would be at "The Limes" in less than a quarter of an hour from there. He would see Amaryllis and return to town by the 7.45 and be at the House again by about nine.

His whole attention during his journey was given to the reiteration of the details of this plan. He sat bolt upright in the corner of the railway carriage calculating the time it had taken to drive to Liverpool Street, the time the train was likely to take in reaching Hadbury—it had been two minutes late in starting.

ing—and the time it would take him to walk to "The Limes."

As the train slowed up in the station, he opened the door and dropped with a little run on to the platform. He strode out of the station, morbidly afraid of being recognised, and took the road towards Amaryllis's home. The sun had set. It was very cold; sleet was falling thinly and the roads were sticky with half-frozen mud. As Sir Roger stalked along in the dusk, he was still preoccupied in estimating the time it would take him to walk there. Twelve minutes at the least; probably more. One could not step out when the roads were in such a state.

The hurry into which he had churned himself supplied him with a semblance of resolution, and he had pushed through the gate, dashed up the steps and rung the bell before he realised what he was doing. Then as he waited before the blank surface of the closed door, his courage subsided. His heart beat so fast that a physical sensation of instability almost overcame him, and he involuntarily leant on his stick for support.

The door was opened promptly, and he asked for Miss Gore-Smythe. The harsh indistinctness of his speech startled his own ears, and had a sort of nightmare affinity to the bewilderment of his eyes in the lamplight.

The maid, noticing the strangeness of his aspect, thought that some disaster had happened.

"Mrs Gore-Smythe is not in yet," she said, not quite certain whom he had asked for, "but she will probably be back in a few minutes. Will you come in and wait, sir? I think Miss Amaryllis is in the drawing-room."

He stepped in. She preceded him across the hall, opened the door of the drawing-room and announced him.

Amaryllis, in a white woollen evening frock, was sitting on a low chair under the standard lamp; the light shone on her dusky hair and on the soft white of her gown. Her bare elbows were propped on her knees; her chin rested in the cup of her two hands, and a volume of "*La Guerre et La Paix*," which she was reading absorbedly, lay open on her lap.

She looked up as the door opened, and, seeing Sir Roger, sprang to her feet in surprise, letting the book fall to the floor. Her first thought was that some calamity had overtaken the Army in South Africa.

"O Sir Roger, what has happened?" she cried.

"Nothing! Nothing has happened," he reassured her.

The sight of her almost unnerved him. Surely he had never realised before how different she was from every one else! He gazed at her for one second, his spirit heaving in tumultuous indecision. Could he risk his life's happiness now, at this very hour?

Then he said with an effort for calmness:

"I wanted to see you."

"To see me?" she asked. "Do you mean about something particular?"

"Yes," he said in a choked voice.

Amaryllis recoiled in trepidation. In a flash she perceived what he meant, and her first impulse was to escape, but he stood between her and the door, and he gave her no time to speak.

"Amaryllis," he said, very low, "will you be my wife?"

She had a swift impression that he was a stranger to her, that she was seeing this tall man with his white, anxious face for the first time, and she shrank from him as from some one unknown to her.

"For God's sake——" he began in a loud voice. Then his aspect changed; his look became grave and

he spoke quietly. "Amaryllis, I love you! I have loved you for months—ever since I first saw you, I believe. Will you marry me? Can you love me a little in return?"

He took her hands in his hot, strong grasp, and his touch roused her from her stupefaction.

"Oh, oh! Let me go!" she implored, trying to free herself. "Please let me go!"

"Amaryllis, can't you answer me? Have I been too sudden? Is it possible that you have seen nothing, that you have not guessed——"

The door opened, and they both looked round as Henrietta, in a long grey fur coat, came into the room, her fair face under her big grey hat smiling a welcome to Sir Roger.

With a cry Amaryllis ran to her mother, and, clinging to her, hid her face against her shoulder.

"O mother, mother! I'm so glad you've come!" she cried inarticulately.

Sir Roger strode forward.

"Mrs Gore-Smythe," he said, his forehead bent in a deep frown of anxiety, "you know—you can guess . . . I ought to have spoken to you first . . . I have distressed her."

Henrietta met his look with a smile of encouragement and benign amusement.

"You must make allowances for youth and inexperience, Sir Roger," she said. She glanced down at the girl clinging to her, and then again at him: "Do you know, I think it would be wiser if you would leave us now. It has evidently startled her. You will understand? You don't mind my asking you to go?"

He looked at her, heavily dubious, as if scarcely understanding her.

"I will write to you," she assured him, still smiling. "Let her have a little time to recover—that's all. You shall hear to-morrow, but please go now."

"Of course I will go at once if you wish it," he said still too much perturbed to relax into an answering smile, "but—I may hope to hear from you?"

"To-morrow," she repeated, with a little nod.

Henrietta heaved a sigh of relief as the door closed behind him.

Good Heavens! In another moment the silly child would have refused him!

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CHAPTER XIII

"COME, my darling! Come and sit down," said Henrietta, looking affectionately at the small, dark head pressed against her grey fur.

Amaryllis raised her face. Her eyes were tearful, and her cheeks wet.

"Has he gone?"

"Yes, darling," said Henrietta. "Why, what a silly little goose it is!"

The girl separated herself from her mother's encircling arm. For a little while she stood still in the centre of the room, struggling to keep back her tears, her handkerchief pressed against her lips, her eyelids drooping.

Mrs Gore-Smythe flung off her furs on to the nearest chair, and seated herself in the corner of the sofa.

"Come and sit here by me, dear child," she said, and Amaryllis obeyed gratefully. A reproof of some sort would not have surprised her, and her mother's gentleness was very comfortable. In those rare moments, when Henrietta was tender to her, Amaryllis felt that she would do almost anything in the world to please her mother.

Mrs Gore-Smythe took her daughter's hand.

"Bless me!" she said gaily. "One would think some dreadful calamity had happened. Who would guess to look at you now that the most charming man in Hertfordshire had asked you to marry him? Why, my pet, you ought to be a proud woman at this

moment, instead of dropping hot tears all over your poor mother's best gown."

Amaryllis laughed a little and wept too.

"Oh, why did he?" she lamented. "Why couldn't things stay as they were?"

"Ah, my child, things never can stand still when young, unmarried men and women are concerned," said Henrietta. "If he had not fallen in love with you, he would have fallen in love with some one else and your friendship would necessarily have come to an end. You wouldn't have liked that, you know."

No; Amaryllis felt promptly that she wouldn't have liked that. Anyway, that had not happened and so need not be considered.

But she did not want to marry him. He was charming, he was chivalrous, he was high-minded but she did not want to marry him.

Then why had she not said "no" at once?

"Surely you must have seen for a long time what was in his mind?" said Henrietta, a little reproachfully.

Amaryllis looked up at her mother with scared eyes.

"I—I knew he liked me in a sort of way," she said, "but I didn't think—I didn't realise—and I didn't know it would be like that!"

She had been equally overwhelmed by vehemence and her own agitation. She was relieved that he was gone; his absence gave her a respite and she became calmer.

But she did not want to marry him!

"But, mother," she cried, "if *you* saw, why did you prevent him?"

"Why should I?" said Henrietta gravely. "I had seen any disinclination on your part, of course I should have interfered, though probably no interference would have been necessary. Sir Roger

man of the most delicate sense of honour; he himself would have drawn back at once. And, my darling, I was rejoicing in what I saw. I could not wish for a happier fate for my little daughter than to be the wife of a man like Sir Roger."

Amaryllis was troubled by the suggestion that she had encouraged him, that she had given him a right to expect her consent. Was it true? She did not know! She did not know! She took refuge in the reiteration of her vain regret.

"If only things could have stayed as they were!" she sighed, and Henrietta felt that the moment had come to brace her.

"Now, listen, Amaryllis," she said. "It is foolish and weak to sit here and lament that the inevitable has happened. You must recollect that you have not given Sir Roger a reply, and it is due to him that you let him have it as soon as possible. You are no longer a child, and the moment has come when you must act for yourself. Your own happiness and his are at stake, and while you have no right to prolong your indecision, you have no right either to give him a hasty or ill-considered reply. I do not want to influence you, but remember that in refusing him, you not only lose him as a husband, but as a friend too. He is not the sort of man to get over it easily. He will go out of your life. And I believe, I firmly believe, that he offers you a life of unclouded happiness, for I think that if you search that foolish little heart of yours, you will find that you love him better than you know. Now, darling, if you take my advice, you won't come in to dinner this evening, but let me send it up to you in your own little sitting-room, and then you can just think this over quietly by yourself."

She got up briskly as she spoke and collected her furs and gloves. Amaryllis also rose submissively,

and they went upstairs together. She was thankful to escape the ordeal of dinner.

When they reached the old schoolroom Henrietta bustled about, lit the lamp, poked the fire, pushed forward an armchair, and placed a small table beside it.

All this preparation made Amaryllis feel ridiculous. She hardly knew whether to be angry or laugh. Except that she would be glad to be alone, she was inclined to scout all this fuss and behave as usual.

"There!" said Henrietta, with caressing gaiety, "doesn't that look cosy?"

She bent her head to kiss Amaryllis, who was some inches shorter than her mother.

"Bless you, darling!" she said.

Amaryllis caught hold of her.

"You want me to—to marry him?" she asked quickly.

"My child, I cannot tell you how happy it would make me, and father, too," replied Mrs Gore-Smyth.

"But——" cried Amaryllis.

"Well?" asked her mother, smiling.

"I don't think—I don't think I want to!" said Amaryllis, troubled.

"My child," said Henrietta, "if you *really* did want to, you wouldn't think twice about the matter—you would *know*. And now, darling, I must go," she added. "I shall be late for dinner."

A sort of rage took possession of Amaryllis when her mother had gone. She walked to the window, placed and beat her clenched fists against the marble piece.

How was she to think it over? How was she to come to a decision? How was she to know what to do? What was the use of all this preparation? Would an armchair by the fire help her with adversity? Fool that she had been! Why had she not

what every one else had seen? Then all this might have been prevented. Or, at least, if only she had had presence of mind to say "no" at once!

The thought of refusing him, and what the refusal entailed, checked her senseless anger. Supposing she had said "no," and he gone away? Her heart contracted with involuntary dread. If he had gone, gone altogether, and refused to be friends with her any more, what would her life be like?

Of course, her mother was sweet and kind and loving to her to-night, but she could not help thinking of the incessant rebukes that fretted her daily life. Sir Roger, with his genial, charming courtesy and boyish high spirits, counted for so much in her happiness, now that Kenneth Rodwell had gone!

Her spirit swelled with resentment. Her mother had not wanted her to marry *him*, but she did want her to marry Sir Roger; and yet. . . . She heard a discreet clatter of china and glass outside, and hastily seizing a book she seated herself in the chair which Henrietta had placed for her.

The maid entered and placed the tray on the table beside her.

Food was an interruption; she was not hungry, and the idea of eating bored her. But the smell of the soup was appetising; she tasted it, and found that she was hungry after all.

She smiled as she thought how Kenneth would laugh at her for having a healthy appetite in a romantic crisis, and then quite unexpectedly tears filled her eyes.

What would he say when he heard that she was going to marry Sir Roger? Would he mind? Would he blame her? Again she saw him as he said good-bye to her, she felt his kiss on her hand, and she found herself crying in good earnest, hot, quick tears streaming down her cheeks.

She heard the maid outside again, and in a great hurry she wiped her eyes, and stopped crying. She was quite collected as Mary entered with the fish. Her sense of the ridiculous overcame her when she was alone again, and she gave a little laugh of amusement. How inappropriate of the fish? Her moment of sentiment had come to an abrupt and matter-of-fact end! Clearly, one ought not to indulge in romantic tears at dinner-time. However, since the fish was there, the best thing to do was to eat it.

It had really been very kind and very understanding of her mother to let her have her dinner by herself. How glad, how thankful she was not to have to endure the ceremony in the dining-room, not to have to behave as if nothing had happened, not to have to converse intelligently with her father. If only her mother were always so kind! Probably it was her own fault that she could not please her parents. They told her this so often that she could not help doubting herself.

Of course, if she married Sir Roger. . . .

She became rapt in contemplation of what life would be like. She would be the mistress of Wrottle End. That beautiful old house would be her home. She would move about in those great rooms as she did here at "The Limes," change their arrangements if she wished, handle the china and look into all the cupboards.

She wondered if his mother and grandmother would go on living there when Sir Roger married. She remembered hearing some one say that they would probably not stay there when he brought home his bride. Amaryllis was a little afraid of them because and she felt that she would prefer them not to remain at Wrottle End. But Sir Roger would be always there, and she would become as much accustomed to him as she was to her own mother. He would

always be there, loving her, chaffing her, discussing all sorts of things with her. It would be the same friendship, and something more besides.

Once more Mary entered, this time with rissoles, but Amaryllis was so much interested in her reflections that she accepted this course as coming in the natural order of things, and she ate it mechanically.

Such a life seemed to promise happiness. It appeared very gracious and harmonious to her and surely it represented the best side of aristocratic traditions. Several of the servants had grown old in the service of the Scrymgeours, and their relations were dignified by mutual affection. And such had been the relations of serving and served for hundreds of years! Was there indeed, as Sir Roger said, a very real force in the phrase "time-honoured"? And for generations the Scrymgeours had owned the same land, followed the same traditions. They had been born at Wrottle End, had grown to manhood there, had brought their wives there, and there had died. Now she might take her place amongst them, be called by their name, the wife of Sir Roger Scrymgeour, the mother of his heir.

Was this the happiness she had guessed at when she had read "Richard Feverel"? Was this what life had held in store for her? What had she expected? She did not know, but her dreams had been of something different—something different in herself. Yes; it was her own inner experience that fell short of her expectations. She thought of Sir Roger. No wonder every one loved him.

Then she suddenly saw him as he had been that afternoon, and she frowned in distress. Was it true that if she really did not want to marry him, she would have known it at once?

But surely she had known it at once. She had taken it for granted while he was speaking that she

must refuse him, and it was only his vehemence that had prevented her.

Now she knew she was going to accept him.

Ah, but was she? Was she indeed?

She began to tremble.

The maid entered with the pudding.

"I don't want any," said Amaryllis hastily. "Nothing more, thanks. You can take the tray."

It was still open to her to refuse him.

Was it true that she had encouraged him?

She did not think she had done so consciously, but she did like him very much, she did enjoy talking to him, she did value his good opinion.

But if she married him, she would be acting in direct opposition to all those ideas she was learning to believe in. In some cases, of course, husband and wife could hold different opinions in perfect freedom, but in this instance she must needs conform to his view of life. And not only that, but in time she would come to yield her judgment. She divined that his influence, the habit of daily life, the glamour of the house and its tradition, would prove stronger than her own unsupported sense of justice.

Would Kenneth Rodwell think her wrong? What did that matter now? He had lost faith in her; he had gone.

And whether she stayed at home or whether she married Sir Roger, she had no real freedom to shape her own life. To be really honest, she should take her courage in both hands and ask for leave to go away and work, but she quailed at the thought of the anger she would rouse. Yet her parents did not want her. They would be delighted for her to leave them to make this marriage!

Amaryllis felt it would be ridiculous to refuse to marry because of her poor little opinions. She was so constantly told that they were of no account that

she had almost come to believe it. She was humbly conscious of the outrage she would commit against all commonsense if she sacrificed her chance of happiness and his for such a reason.

Was it possible that she cared for Sir Roger more than she was aware of? Her mother had said so, and she wondered if it were true. . . .

The more her mind dwelt on him, the more her liking for him asserted itself. She was becoming accustomed to the thought of him under this new aspect. She began to feel a sympathetic commiseration for the passionate anxiety that had at first shocked and startled her. She realised with compunction the pain that a refusal would have caused him, and she was glad that her mother had interrupted them. . . .

At about half-past nine Henrietta came up to the schoolroom. Amaryllis looked round, but did not leave her chair by the fire.

Mrs Gore-Smythe swept across the room, lifted the small table with the lamp on it out of the way, and standing in front of her she put her two hands on Amaryllis's shoulders and looked searchingly and indulgently into her face.

"Well, darling?" she said. "Has your foolish little heart come to a decision?"

A bright colour came into Amaryllis's cheeks.

She put up her slim, white arms, and clasped them round her mother's neck.

"Yes, I think so," she sighed.

Henrietta sank on her knees, and held the girl in a close, tender embrace.

"My child!" she cried, tears of joy running down her cheeks. "My own darling little daughter!"

Not very much later Mr Gore-Smythe knocked at the door.

"May I come in?" he enquired.

"Come in, father," cried Henrietta gaily. She was now who was sitting in the armchair, while Amaryllis squatted on the floor beside her. "It's all right," said Henrietta triumphantly, meeting his eyes as Amaryllis scrambled to her feet.

Mr Gore - Smythe strode forward toward his daughter, and taking her hand with some solemnity he kissed her forehead.

"God bless you, my child," he said, "I could not entrust you to a better man." Then, relaxing the gravity of his demeanour, he smiled and remarked jocosely: "Upon my word, mother, we shall have to mind our p's and q's. Do you realise that we have got a great lady here?"

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CHAPTER XIV

THE younger Lady Scrymgeour was very angry when her son told her of his engagement.

Sir Roger did not return to London that night as he had intended, but he went to Wrottle End, and on the plea of work to do, shut himself up in his study for the entire evening. At about ten o'clock a note came from Mrs Gore-Smythe, but he refrained from telling his mother and grandmother of his happiness until he should have seen Amaryllis again. He went to "The Limes" early the next morning, and had breakfast with the Gore-Smythes, not returning home until after eleven.

He went straight upstairs to his mother's boudoir, where he found her and his grandmother both writing letters. Amy was seated at the small satinwood bureau that stood between the hearth and the window. She had placed herself very slightly askew, and all the folds of her black skirt were drawn to one side of her chair. She wrote slowly, and her graceful head was bent gently forward to keep watch over her pen. His grandmother was established in front of the fire, her feet on the fender, a writing-board on her knees.

Sir Roger came in with a quick step and an air of buoyant alacrity. The two women looked round.

"Ah, Roger, here you are!" said Amy in her quiet voice. "You were out early this morning."

"There's nothing wrong, I hope?" asked old Lady Scrymgeour.

Sir Roger laughed.

"Nothing! No, nothing!" he replied, much amused. "On the contrary . . . I have been at 'The Limes.' I had breakfast with the Gore-Smythes."

"With the *Gore-Smythes*!" echoed the old lady in instant alarm, but Amy's habit of abstraction made her always slow to draw conclusions from what was said to her, and as he spoke she scarcely remembered that the Gore-Smythes had a daughter.

Her mother-in-law's tone startled her.

Sir Roger blushed.

"I expect you can guess what I'm going to tell you," he said. "You've always wanted me to marry, you know, and——"

Amy's attention was fully awake now, and sudden suspicious anger surged under her calm exterior. Then Roger had been *caught*; by which she meant that a girl who was self-interested had aroused his love. He was going to tell them he was engaged, and there could be no other explanation of the fact that they had guessed nothing. A lack of love on the woman's side would account for Roger's secretiveness; it was bound to exercise a harmful influence. The younger Lady Scrymgeour believed in the holiness of love, and her first thought was that if it had been a case of true, reciprocal feeling she herself would not have been unkindly left in ignorance till the last minute.

Old Lady Scrymgeour uttered an exclamation of dismay. She was sitting bolt upright, clutching the edges of her writing-board. Every line on her face had deepened.

"Roger! Surely you can't mean——"

"I'm going to marry Miss Gore-Smythe," he said softly, "Amaryllis."

"*Roger!*" she gasped, and then added in sudden irritation: "Oh, you're joking, I suppose?"

"Certainly not!" he retorted peremptorily. "What do you mean?"

"What do *you* mean?" cried the old lady furiously. "Are you really under the delusion that that twopenny-halfpenny little girl——"

He interrupted her haughtily.

"I'm sorry if you are not pleased. I thought you knew enough of her to congratulate me."

He turned his back on her.

"Well, mother?" he asked.

Amy was exceedingly angry, but she showed no outward signs of her agitation. She was even contemptuous of her mother-in-law's outburst, especially as she knew that Lady Scrymgeour could not hold out against Sir Roger's slightest annoyance. She knew at once that it was futile to attempt to coerce him on such a point—indeed, her helplessness added to her wrath and sense of having been slighted—but she wanted to make him feel her indignation. She wanted him to know what he was doing.

"I think you are making a great mistake, Roger," she said. She was sitting half-turned away from the bureau to face him; her pen was still in her hand, which was resting on the arm of her chair.

"Good God——" he began, bitterly disappointed. Then he too became angry. "Perhaps you will tell me on what grounds you hold such an opinion," he said with fierce politeness, but his emotions overcame him the next minute. "How you can have known her for so long and not seen what she is—— Good Heavens! but you *must* have known what I felt!"

"I did not, Roger," said Amy. "How should I think that you could fall in love with——" She checked herself, and then went on: "For one thing, she is so young."

"Do you think I am too old for her?" he asked anxiously. "It is true she is very young. It is

astonishing that she should consent to marry a man so much older than herself."

"That is not what I meant," said Amy. "She can hardly be a companion to you."

"A companion!" he cried. "Why, mother, I know no one to whom I enjoy talking more."

"You may enjoy talking to her as an acquaintance," replied his mother, "but that is a very different thing from the companionship between husband and wife. That should be founded on love——"

"And you think it impossible that she should love me?"

"You know I did not mean that," said Amy, with energy. "But, Roger, I cannot think she is fitted to be your wife."

"My dear mother, surely I may be allowed——" He tried to interrupt her, but she did not permit him to continue. The quiet persistence of her speech invariably obliged other people to listen to her, partly because of her real dignity, and partly because it was impossible to make her pay attention to an interruption.

"I am quite willing to believe that she is very nice and good, but I cannot think she is fitted to be your wife," she repeated. "I have a right to speak, Roger, for not only am I your mother, but she is coming to fill my place. After all, birth and surroundings count for something. Your wife ought to have been brought up to the traditions of an old family. How can you expect her otherwise to fill her position as the mistress of your house? Who are the Gore-Smythes? And what can their daughter know of what would be required of her as your wife?"

"My dear mother," said Sir Roger, with irritation, "whatever you may think of Mr and Mrs Gore-Smyth, Amaryllis herself is fitted for any position. If you knew her better, you would say the same."

"From what I have seen of her I am afraid she is like so many girls of the present day," said Amy, her temper getting the better of her discretion. "She seems to me to want to be thought clever and original and unlike other people."

Sir Roger became crimson.

"That is exceedingly unjust," he said. "I thought you had more insight."

He controlled himself with difficulty. Twice he paced the length of the room, and then abruptly left them.

"Roger! Roger!" cried old Lady Scrymgeour in dismay.

"Don't call him back," said Amy. "He is angry now. It is better to——"

"My dear, I'm too old to quarrel," cried Lady Scrymgeour, putting down her writing-board and taking her stick. She rose and crossed the room as quickly as she could, while she spoke. "But he took me by surprise, for I really am fond of the girl. She's a nice child—there's no objection to her, but her mother, and she is not——"

She finished the sentence outside the door.

Amy was annoyed. How like granny first to lose her temper with Roger, and the next instant apologise! Surely she might know that nothing was to be gained by impulsiveness! And it was particularly vexing, because it undermined the effect of her own objection.

For a long time she remained sitting there motionless, absorbed by an inward struggle. She knew that she had got to give in, for a real quarrel with Roger was out of the question. All she had to hope for was that something would happen to break the engagement, but as a wise woman she ought to disregard any such hope.

She knew this, and yet her whole soul rose in pro-

test against this marriage. She disliked Amaryllis she disapproved of her. She disliked Mr and Gore-Smythe. The subtle difference between people of her sort and people not of her sort was an insuperable barrier between them; she felt that they were intruders into the inner circle of her life. And this intrusion seemed to her treacherous, because it had taken her by surprise. She was deeply hurt because she had foreseen nothing.

She would have to give up the reins of government; she would no longer be mistress of Wroth End. Of course, she had been prepared to face some day, but to yield her place to Amaryllis was bitter to her. What sympathy could there be between her and Amaryllis Gore-Smythe?

Roger ought to have considered her a little. Surely she was not unreasonable in thinking that he might at least have warned her of what was in his mind.

Of course, the Gore-Smythes must be full of triumph. She was convinced that they had purchased Roger, and how could Amaryllis then be worthy of him? Only a great love could make her worthy and Amy could not believe that the girl was capable of a great love.

Amy looked back upon the episode that had coloured her whole life. Yes; a love like that was an education in itself—a revelation! And Roger. Did Roger love this girl with this same self-sacrificing passion? She knew that *he* was capable of it. Suddenly her resentment rose against Amaryllis because she believed her nature too small to be capable of him with complete self-abnegation.

Amy knew that she had no right to compare Amaryllis till she was more intimately acquainted with her, but in her heart she did condemn her. She could not overcome her prejudice against her.

However, possibly something might happen to open Roger's eyes before it was too late.

Ah! But it was too late now. She knew Roger too well to hope for any change in him.

Presently Roger came into the room. His face was stern, but he spoke as if nothing had happened.

"I have got to go back to town," he said, "but I shall be down again on Saturday. Will you go and see Amaryllis, mother?"

"I did not mean to hurt you, Roger," said Amy, raising steady eyes to his face. "Yes, I will go this afternoon."

His face lit up. He was impatient of any hindrance to the complete enjoyment of his happiness. He strode across to her gladly.

"Thank you, mother dearest," he said, kissing her.

CHAPTER XV

LADY SCRYMGEOUR called at "The Limes" early the afternoon, and much to Henrietta's regret both she and Amaryllis were out. Mrs Gore-Smythe did not like the ladies at Wrottle End any better than they liked her, but latterly she had experienced a certain pleasurable excitement in meeting them, which now reached its height. She laughed inwardly whenever she thought of them. Surely it was the most delightfully humorous situation! They had conveyed her as clearly as was consistent with an appearance of civility that she was a person of no consequence, and she had submitted, and consented to ignore what she need not see. Now Sir Roger was going to marry her daughter! But what was perhaps even more amusing, she firmly believed that old Lady Scrymgeour had tried to encourage a liking between Amaryllis and Kenneth Rodwell. Was it any wonder that her triumph was sweet?

Nevertheless, the possibility that Lady Scrymgeour might oppose the marriage had worried her a little. If they chose to be disagreeable, it would upset Amaryllis dreadfully, and Henrietta was naturally anxious for her sake that there should be no friction. The child was absurdly sensitive and shy, possibly because she was so young, and Mrs Gore-Smythe had an uneasy consciousness that any untoward trifle might, even now, ruin everything.

She picked up Lady Scrymgeour's card with satisfaction.

"Ah, then she does mean to be pleasant," she said unwarily.

Amaryllis, who was beginning to mount the stairs, turned round quickly.

"Why, do you think she will mind—object, I mean?" she asked, looking alarmed.

Henrietta repented her hasty remark.

"Oh, my darling, no! Why should she?"

"But you seemed to think——" began Amaryllis.

"I spoke without thinking, my child," said Henrietta briskly. "Of course, it would be absurd if she did object, it would simply mean that she is a selfish woman whose opinion is not worth considering. But I don't imagine that there is the least likelihood of such a thing."

"I hope not," said Amaryllis, still a little troubled.

"Now, don't be foolish, darling," said her mother, coming up the stairs to where she stood; "don't worry your little head over a phantom. Certainly if she had meant to be disagreeable she would not have come to call. I wish we had been in."

"So do I," said Amaryllis, and they went upstairs together to take off their hats and furs.

When Henrietta came down to the drawing-room she found Amaryllis already there, making tea.

"I think I shall go and see her to-morrow morning," said the girl, as she replaced the kettle on the spirit-lamp.

"Who? Oh, Lady Scrymgeour?"

"Yes."

"Do, my darling," said Henrietta approvingly. "I'll come with you."

"O mother——"

"Would you rather I did not?" asked Mrs Gore-Smythe, ready to humour her in everything.

Amaryllis was grateful to her for understanding.

"If you don't mind," she said apologetically, "I think I would rather go alone—the first time."

"Just as you like, my child," said Henrietta, seating herself on the sofa. "Thank you, darling," Amaryllis gave her her tea. "Yes, I think you're right. It would be better for you to go by yourself."

Mr Gore-Smythe came into the room.

"I see Lady Scrymgeour has been here," he remarked.

"Yes," said Henrietta, "and we were out. Such pity!"

"So you didn't see her?" he said, taking a slice of cake. "Well, my lady, have you any tea for me?"

"I shall write to Jessie to-night," said Henrietta contentedly, "and tell her the great news."

The next morning Amaryllis went to Wrotham Park to see her future mother-in-law, but the visit was not a success. Lady Scrymgeour tried to be kind, but Amaryllis perceived at once a reserve in her manner. She was shown upstairs to the boudoir, and as she entered, Amy, gently sedate, advanced to greet her.

"My dear, I am very glad to see you," she said, taking her hand and kissing her. "Roger told us the news yesterday. I was so sorry not to find you at home."

The formality of her voice paralysed Amaryllis into blushing muteness.

"Well, young woman," said old Lady Scrymgeour, "come here and kiss your new grandmother."

Amaryllis turned to her with alacrity.

"Aren't you surprised at your boldness when you see your predecessors?" continued the old lady. "How came you to think yourself good enough for the post?"

"I didn't—I don't," said Amaryllis, laughing.

"But he did, eh?" remarked his grandmother.

"Well, well! I suppose we must make the best of you."

"If you please," said Amaryllis, half shyly, half smilingly.

Amy was irritated by her mother-in-law's manner. She thought it unwise, uncalled for, and it made her own part more difficult to play.

"It is very unlucky that Roger should have to go back to town," she said, "but of course his time is very much taken up."

"I suppose he won't be back till Saturday," said Amaryllis timidly.

"Dear me!" exclaimed his grandmother, "and to-day is only Thursday—another whole day and a half before you see him again! I suppose you think there is no one like him in the world!"

For some reason Amaryllis felt a little guilty, but she laughed and said gently:

"Well—is there?"

"Oh, of course not! Why, he thinks the same of you, and surely that proves it."

Amy felt her annoyance increasing, and in order to get away from old Lady Scrymgeour's suggested taking Amaryllis over the house.

She conducted her from room to room, up the slippery oak staircase, along uneven corridors, and into huge chambers furnished with four-post beds, and heavy, sombre cupboards. And all the time she did her duty, conversing with quiet amiability, recalling anecdotes of Roger's boyhood, mentioning details of housekeeping, and referring to her own experiences as a bride. She also spoke of the long period during which she had managed the estate. She conversed amiably, but through all she said there was an undercurrent that humiliated Amaryllis. Amy herself was unaware how much her manner betrayed; she was completely preoccupied by the effort she was making.

When Amaryllis had gone she went away to her

room and wept as she had not wept for twenty years. Had she guessed that Amaryllis too, on reaching home, had given way to passionate tears, she might have felt more friendly towards her. As it was, her own manner had raised a barrier between them which she resented as the result of something lacking in the girl's nature.

Amaryllis was profoundly disturbed. Roger's exuberant happiness had reassured her, and she had found herself shyly but peacefully content with her decision. But even one dissentient opinion had aroused misgivings in her. She was humiliated and uneasy, and Henrietta found her crying bitterly in her room.

Mrs Gore-Smythe was full of righteous indignation against "that woman" who had dared to upset her little daughter, and Frank "confounded her airs" and they both cosseted Amaryllis, assuring her that as long as Roger was satisfied it did not matter what any one else thought.

During Sir Roger's absence Amaryllis was occupied in getting accustomed to the new aspect of her future. She said very little, but she thought about it all day. It was so strangely difficult to realise, and yet everything tended to remind her that a great change had taken place concerning her. She was treated with consideration; she had become of importance; all the roughnesses had suddenly been eliminated out of her life. She had the same sort of feeling of being exempt from ordinary rules that she used to have as a child, when recovering from an illness, or when she had been quite unusually good.

On Saturday Sir Roger came down to stay. On Monday, and the Gore-Smythes all dined at Wrotham. End that evening. Before his arrival Amaryllis found herself in an agony of shyness; her heart beat fast at the mere thought of seeing him,

cheeks burnt and her hands grew cold. But as soon as the moment of their first meeting was over, his vigorous, wholesome high spirits restored her. He chaffed her, and their old comradeship was resumed, only with something added of intimacy. Amaryllis was profoundly grateful to him for the easy, light-hearted way in which he took everything as a matter of course, and stilled her agitation. There were moments when she was with him when she almost forgot that she was engaged to him.

These few days since his proposal seemed to have passed with incredible rapidity, and yet as she looked back she felt that she had lived through months of experience. She was very happy, but almost too much was happening; she had too much to feel and to think about. On the whole, she was relieved that Sir Roger was going back to London on Monday.

On that morning Henrietta uttered an exclamation as she looked through the letters waiting for her on the breakfast table.

"Well, really," she cried, "again there is no letter from Jessie! Why, I wrote to tell her about Amaryllis on Wednesday. How very odd! I think she *might* have written!"

CHAPTER XVI

HENRIETTA thought Amaryllis looked tired, and after lunch she sent her to lie down.

"Take a novel and tuck yourself up on your bed," she said; "I shouldn't wonder if you slept a little, darling. And, mind, I shan't expect to see any more of you till tea-time."

Mrs Gore-Smythe found that the excitement had told on her also. She too was tired, and she looked forward to a peaceful afternoon in her own sitting-room. She selected her book with care. She wanted something familiar, something that did not demand much attention, and she chose "The Heart of Redcliffe." She was very fond of the comfortable, homely atmosphere of Miss Yonge's books, and the tone of a delicate virtue was exactly suited to her present frame of mind.

About half an hour later she heard the front gate squeak on its hinges. She wondered indifferently who had come in, but, fortunately, it was scarcely likely to be a visitor; it was still early in the afternoon, and she was glad to think that there was at least an hour before her of repose.

But her ear caught the sound of some one coming upstairs.

"I suppose it is some tiresome note that wants an answer," she thought, bored at the prospect of interruption. The door opened and the parlour-maid appeared.

"Mrs Goulburn!" she announced, and Jessie, smiling,

and neat in a long grey tweed coat with cape sleeves and a black felt hat, walked in.

"Jessie!" exclaimed Henrietta, and she leapt to her feet in enthusiasm. "Jessie! my *dear* Jessie!" she cried, running forward and kissing her eagerly. "How delightful of you to come! I was getting quite hurt at hearing nothing from you; but this is far, far better than a letter! And now we will have a real cosy afternoon together. You've come to stay, of course?"

"I've just brought things for the night," said Jessie, unbuttoning her coat and throwing it off. Underneath she was wearing a blue serge tailor-made gown and a plain white silk blouse.

"Oh, but now I've got you I'm going to keep you for more than a night," cried Henrietta, taking both her sister's hands.

Jessie's lips suddenly moved as if she were going to cry, but Henrietta was too much excited to notice.

"You must tell Dick that he's got to do without you. How is he, Jessie? Sit down, my dear."

"Very well indeed," said Mrs Goulburn, sitting down in the chair her sister placed for her in front of the fire. Mrs Gore-Smythe took a seat on the left side of the hearth, and she sat leaning eagerly forward, her arms resting on her knees, and her hands clasped.

"And mother? And the children? Are they all well?"

"The children are all right. Mother is not very well," replied Jessie. She found that her hat interfered with her comfort in leaning back, and while she spoke she pulled out a couple of hat-pins, took it off, and pressed and patted the iron-grey hair on her forehead into order. She then stuck the pins into the hat and placed it on her lap. "It's difficult now to keep her happy. The children tire her,

and yet she's always wanting them with her, or else she feels neglected."

"Isn't she pleased about Amaryllis?" asked Henrietta contentedly. "That ought to cheer her." Jessie glanced at her.

"I suppose it is a good marriage for her?" asked, and there was a note of anxiety in her voice. Still Henrietta noticed nothing.

"Oh, my dear, we could not wish for anything better," she said; "I cannot tell you how happy he makes us. He is charming—simply charming! Surely you must have met him when you were here?"

"Yes; I think I did," said Mrs Goulburn gravely. "Doesn't he live in that beautiful Elizabethan house at Wrottle? I've no very clear recollection of him though."

"I think he really is almost ideal—so amusing, good-looking, and such charming manners. And then—well, one can't help thinking of the position she will have," continued Henrietta. "O Jessie, you knew how anxiously we have watched all this going on. I saw what was in his mind weeks ago. He and Amaryllis struck up a great friendship, I know, but I don't believe the child knew she was in love with him till he actually proposed, and she nearly as possible refused him from sheer astonishment. But it's delightful to see how happy she is now. Of course he's a good many years older than she is, but I don't think that's a disadvantage, is it?"

Throughout this speech Jessie had been watching her sister attentively. The armchair was large, and her small figure was leaning back into one corner of it, leaving almost room for some one to share it with her. She had aged very much, and yet she looked better-looking than she had ever been before.

had grown almost plump; her face, though covered by a net-work of fine wrinkles, had acquired an aspect of habitual contentment and a genial self-confidence. Her grey hair was becoming to her. At this moment, however, her expression was harassed, and she was nervously pulling the hat-pins out of her hat and pushing them in again.

"No, I don't think it does matter," she said in answer to Henrietta's question.

She had allowed Henrietta to talk, and she had answered her with a curious sensation that their relations in the conversation were temporary. She had waited, not exactly because she wished to gain time, but because she really could hardly have done otherwise. She could not have blurted out what she had come to say immediately on seeing Henrietta. It would have been too brutal.

But now the moment seemed to have come when she ought to take the initiative, and in the commotion that suddenly possessed her at the mere thought of doing so, she spoke before she expected, and was surprised at the sound of her own words.

"Henrietta! Does Amaryllis know?"

"Know what?" asked Henrietta, unsuspecting.

She met Jessie's eyes, and the almost incredible intention of the question dawned on her.

Jessie hesitated for a second, and then defined her meaning.

"About you. About what you did. And the trial."

She no longer dared look at her sister, neither could she sit still. She rose aimlessly, and her hat fell on to the floor. She picked it up and threw it back into the chair she had left.

"What do you mean?" said Henrietta, in a hard, strangled voice, and Jessie swung round towards her. At the sight of Henrietta's white, rigid face, she flung herself on her knees beside her.

"Oh, my dear! my dear! Don't you see they must both know before they can marry!" she cried, putting her arms round her sister. But Henrietta pushed her away roughly.

"Don't touch me," she said harshly. "I don't know why I care for you, Jessie. You have always tried to ruin my happiness. Always!"

Jessie was hurt. She knew that she had been consistently loyal to her sister, and such a reproach was unjustifiable, even in a moment of extreme bitterness.

"How can you say so?" she exclaimed, rising from her knees. "How can you be so unjust!"

Henrietta also stood up.

"Jessie," she said, in a low voice, "if you interfere with Amaryllis's marriage, I will never forgive you."

For a moment it seemed to Mrs Goulburn as if the steadiness of her brain were giving way; she had got to face a scene—indeed, she was already involved in a scene, and she was nervously in awe of her own sensations. She prayed for courage and coherence.

"You tried to hinder my marriage with Frank," continued Henrietta, perceiving that she had gained a slight advantage; but she had mistaken its cause, and her words gave Jessie the impetus she needed.

"Would to God that I *had*!" she cried passionately. "What right had you to marry, and bring a child into the world to suffer for your fault? If you were wicked before, you were far more wicked *then*. I did not realise—*why* I was such a fool—but I did not——"

She was on the verge of tears and she stopped abruptly. Henrietta was staggered. Her marriage wicked? All her happiness during these past years based on a wicked action! All her virtue, all her respectability to count for nothing! Was she ind

hopelessly entrapped by her crime? She recognised in herself a horrible familiar misgiving lest it should be true. The doubt which had now lain dormant for so long was still there to confront her with all its terrors, and because of the response in herself Jessie's words were doubly cruel.

But above her dismay her active attention was fixed upon the point of contest, and in the face of Jessie's emotion her anger slipped from her as a feeble weapon. Despair shook her.

"Jessie!" she cried wildly, "you *can't* mean it? You *can't know* what you are asking?"

Then she stopped to eye Jessie with anxiety. Of course she could not insist upon it, really. How like her to interfere without thinking!

The mere utterance of the words gave her a sort of reassurance, and she became angry again.

"I really sometimes think you must be crazy, Jessie. I suppose you do such things because you've no imagination. But how even *you* could suggest"—she drew in a tremulous breath—"really, you have surpassed yourself this time! For a good woman, the amount of harm that you've done or tried to do in your life—It's—it's monstrous. Why, it's—it's *absurd*!" she said, making an extraordinary effort to scout the idea as something too extravagant to be taken seriously; but she was hampered by a sense of the vastness of the calamity threatening her. "Besides, what right have *you* to interfere?" she added with sudden vigour. "It was outrageous of you to broach the subject at all. I do think you are the most insensitive person I have ever met. I have forgiven you many things, many times, Jessie, but I do not think I shall ever feel the same to you again after this."

Her voice sank into silence. She was sick with the consciousness that her words were ineffectual,

and her eyes were fixed on Jessie with a piteous almost child-like expression of distress.

"The mere fact that I know makes me responsible," said Mrs Goulburn stubbornly, and stung her sister to fresh exasperation. Surely Jessie was the stupidest woman in the world! Henrietta clasped her hands in desperation, and knocked them against the chimney-piece.

"Responsible for what?" she cried vehemently. "What in Heaven's name is to be gained by this knowing? What do they or I, or you, or any of us gain but misery, misery, misery! Haven't I atoned for what I did in twenty years? Haven't I lived a good life for twenty years, so that people have liked me, and have cared to be friends with me? Isn't it enough for them to know *that* much of me? Why should they know more? I can't understand what you are driving at! I can't understand what you mean! I can't indeed!"

"Henrietta," said Jessie, "do you think Sir Roger would have asked Amaryllis to marry him if he had known?"

Mrs Gore-Smythe felt guilty. She did not answer at once.

"But he *has* proposed," she cried, "and they loved each other, and you want to separate them and break their hearts."

"Do you think I am not wretched, too?" cried Jessie fiercely. "Why didn't you prevent their falling in love? Why didn't you send the poor child away when you saw what was likely to happen? Why didn't you tell her months ago? You could have prevented all this if you had had one spark of right feeling! What were you thinking of to let things come to such a pass? But instead, you have fostered and encouraged the feeling between them. It is you who have broken their hearts, not I."

"No!" cried Henrietta, with a hard glitter in her eyes, "you are quite mistaken. I don't care what you say, but they shall *never know*! Never!"

Jessie hesitated.

"What do you mean to do, then?" she asked coldly.

"Do? Nothing. There is no reason why I should do anything. You have got a distorted view of the whole matter. It would be simply wanton to make every one wretched by telling them what they need never know. No one knows but you and Dick, and as long as Sir Roger isn't told of it, it can do him no harm. He can't mind what he doesn't know. There is no fear now that any one will recognise me. It is twenty-one years ago. Surely I may consider myself safe after twenty-one years!"

"You can never be absolutely safe," said Jessie; "as long as you live you can never be absolutely sure that some chance won't discover you."

Henrietta could not control a shudder. Her hands were uncomfortably cold and moist, and her cheeks were burning. In the silence they both noticed that the fire shifted slightly.

"Do you really think that?" said Henrietta, a little hoarsely.

"What do you suppose Sir Roger would feel if he found out after his marriage?" continued Jessie. "What would Amaryllis herself feel? Henrietta, you have no right to run the risk. You *must* tell her, or *I* shall."

She had said it at last. The position was stated beyond mistake. Henrietta had known all the time that that was what it amounted to—"Tell, or I shall"—and all the time she had been trying to grasp its full meaning. From moment to moment realisation had approached and escaped her; her power of comprehension closed before it, as the leaf of a sensitive plant shuts at a rough touch.

She sat down and covered her face with her hands. She was struggling to understand, and because she could not, she felt inclined to cry like a child.

It was all so dreadful. She ought to be firm, to take a high hand with Jessie, to make her ashamed of herself, to frustrate her interference. She ought at least to be able to plead with her, and turn her from her purpose in sheer pity. But she was incapable of thinking of anything to say. Her trouble was so big that it came between her mental vision and everything else. She felt as if she were close under a blank wall, and staring stupidly at the stone immediately in front of her.

She noticed the silence of the room.

No doubt Jessie believed she was thinking, but she was not. No; she was not thinking. Her face was burning; it had been a relief to press her cold hands against her forehead and cheeks, but now her hands were getting warm too. Should she call Frank? Could he master Jessie? No, no! Jessie hated him. He would be able to do nothing with her. Besides . . .

Good God! *What would he say?*

"He will never forgive me," she thought dumbly. No; his own record would make him unmerciful to her.

If only it had been Dick that had come to coerce him! But it would not have been so bad for him, and of course as it was, he would be included in the confession!

All at once she felt as if an iron hand had gripped her heart and arrested its beating. She saw her from the standpoint she had acquired in twenty years of respectability! She was a murderess! She had committed a low, vile crime, and had in consequence been smirched with publicity. And Jessie said she must tell Amaryllis! Amaryllis, whom

had brought up with such care! Whom she had sheltered from all the harsher knowledge of life! Whom she had scolded for trifles, fostering in her a purity of outlook!

Amaryllis! Her little girl! Her little baby! She seemed to feel her again in her arms, she seemed to feel the weight of the little warm body, and all her mother's love surged in her. Swift memories passed through her mind of the little child, of her dawning consciousness, of how she learnt to smile at her, how she learnt to call her!

Henrietta uttered a strange, inarticulate cry of anguish. She raised her face, and Jessie was startled to see how haggard she was.

"Jessie," she whispered, "you cannot be so cruel!"

An immense pity overcame Jessie; she was blinded with tears, and her throat ached with the effort to keep herself from crying. She opened her lips to speak, and then turned away without saying anything.

"Jessie," whispered Henrietta again.

Mrs Goulburn turned back towards her sister.

"I—I—I can't help it," she said huskily, and she hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

Henrietta stood up and pulled her sister's hands away from her face, and Jessie stood there passively, her head bowed, helplessly weeping.

"You don't understand," said Henrietta. "I did not either, when you first said it. If you understood you wouldn't have said it. But you haven't thought that—Amaryllis——" It was the first time she had mentioned her name, and her voice shook, but she tried to go on. She began her sentence again.

"You haven't thought that Amaryllis——"

With a sudden cry she wrung Jessie's wrists.

"She is my child, my child! Don't you under-

stand? And she loves me, and believes in me! It is impossible! cruel! It is wrong; it can't be right—it *can't* be!"

She flung Jessie's hands from her, and stood watching her with a look of defiant pain.

Jessie sat down; she could stand no longer. She was shattered and weary; she hated her own act while she believed herself justified. She was stupefied with all her emotions, and in her dull fatigue was sure only of one thing: Amaryllis and Roger must be told.

"If he cares for her, probably he will marry all the same," she said.

Henrietta laughed harshly.

"Do you think *that* is what I'm thinking of?" cried. "How like you, Jessie! It is true, it is enough, and Amaryllis will be unhappy for a time. But if it were only *that*, both he and she would overcome it in the end. Lovers do. But how do you think—how do you think—she will face life—she knows. Merciful Heavens! are you so stupid you can't understand that we are mother and child?"

Jessie felt small. Her sympathy had been blunted. She became impatient because she had blundered. This must come to an end. It was useless to press the distress of argument.

"Of course I understand," she said snarply. "I think it is you who might have realised it a long time sooner. Henrietta, you *must* control yourself. It has got to be faced. You are only agitating yourself to no purpose."

"I'll fetch Frank," said Henrietta, starting to the door; but Jessie seized her arm.

"No, you will not," she said. "Nothing that I could say can make any difference. Dick has talked it over for hours. I shall wire for him if Frank tries to interfere. The matter is

hands—Dick's and mine. The only choice you have is whether you will tell her yourself or let me do it."

The gong drummed in the hall.

"That's tea," said Henrietta weakly.

"You can't go down," said Jessie; "you are not fit for it. You must have some tea brought up here."

She rang the bell. She noticed that the fire was almost out, and she knelt down to rake out the ashes, and put fresh coal on with the tongs. While she was doing this, the maid came to the door, and she looked round over her shoulder to give the order.

"Mrs Gore-Smythe is not very well," she said. "Will you bring tea for both of us up here, please?"

They waited for it in silence. Jessie's mind was occupied only with the firmness of her determination. She pressed her lips together, and assumed her most business-like and matter-of-fact manner. But Henrietta sat nervously upright, still on the alert to escape her fate. It was impossible, impossible, impossible! Her brain was throbbing with the consciousness of all that she might have said and had not said. After tea she would make Jessie see that it was impossible.

A silver tray with an array of tea-things for two was brought in and placed on a table beside Mrs Gore-Smythe.

She mechanically took up the tea-pot, and began to fill the cups. Then, quite unexpectedly, she gave way. She had come to the end of her endurance. A bewildering uncertainty as to what to do with the tea-pot troubled her, and she looked wildly round for help. Jessie thought she was going to faint, and started forward to take it from her slackening fingers, and with a low, hoarse shriek Henrietta hid her face against the back of the chair and burst into a passion of tears. She sobbed aloud, clenching her hands and shaken from head to foot. Jessie

put her arm round her in silence. She let her for a while, and Henrietta found relief in the free sobbing that was convulsing her physically.

When at last she became quieter from exhaustion, Jessie made her drink some tea. Henrietta held the cup in her unsteady hand, still sobbing, raised it to her quivering lips, she that she was again the centre of a drama. Her eyes were most closed; she knew that her face must be swollen, tear-stained and flushed. Surely she had suffered as she was now suffering!

She raised her eyes to Jessie's face. "We should have to go away," she said forlornly. "We should have to leave our home and our friends and begin all over again! And we have been so happy!"

"I don't see that that will be necessary," said Jessie in her cool, collected manner. "No one else need know. Sir Roger certainly would tell no one, whether the marriage goes on or not."

A new idea occurred to Henrietta.

"Then — I suppose — Frank *need* not know either?" she said with a little gasp.

Jessie was surprised that she should be afraid to tell him.

"Would that be quite fair?" she enquired dubiously.

Henrietta did not reply. Her thoughts had been fixed on Frank and were riveted upon herself. She was herself to be pathetic as a victim. Retribution threatened her after twenty years. She was now upon to pay the price of her sin, and a price beyond anything she had ever thought of. But no, that could not be! She had spoken unwarily, as she and Frank were going to give in, and she *could not* give in. She must make Jessie understand. And she must have time to think! She could not think now. She could not collect all her arguments against

Perhaps she had better go to Frank after all. Perhaps, he would be able to do something with Jessie.

"I wish I could make you understand," she said fretfully, "only I am too tired."

"My dear," said Jessie, full of pity, "do rest now, and drink some more tea. Don't let's talk of it any more for the present."

But the next moment terror gripped Henrietta again.

"Jessie!" she wailed, "she will be here in a minute. She will come to see what is the matter with me! Oh, why are you so cruel? Can't you see that she *ought not* to know!"

CHAPTER XVII

UNKNOWN to Henrietta, Mr Gore-Smythe had gone out in the middle of the afternoon, and having seen Colonel Merriman had gone home with him to play chess. So it happened that Amaryllis found no one in the drawing-room at tea-time. She was surprised for she was a few minutes late. She had come running downstairs, smiling and apologetic, ready to be laughed at for having verified her mother's prediction and slept profoundly until the gong had roused her. It was with a sense of flatness that she found the room empty.

She made the tea and sat down to wait. Nobody came.

Probably her father was out; he often was at that hour. But her mother? Was it possible that her mother had fallen asleep, too? She laughed at the thought and began her tea.

She hoped her mother *was* resting. She herself was splendidly refreshed by her sleep. A gulch of oblivion separated her from the feverish exaltation of the past days, and her spirit had emerged with a new sense of cool tranquillity. Certainly an afternoon sleep was as different from the ordinary repose of every night as wine from milk. For something, it was so unusual that it gave one a feeling of having achieved something noteworthy.

She finished her first cup of tea, and still Mrs Gore-Smythe did not appear.

Amaryllis became impatient. She wished her mother would come. For the first time in her

she was being treated by Henrietta as grown up, and on a level with her. She was discovering that companionship with her pretty, light-hearted, caressing mother had charms hitherto unguessed at, and she began to wonder whether after all the old state of things had not been her own fault. All her latent affection for her mother, which had been held in check by constant fault-finding, now asserted itself under the new conditions.

She went to the door and looked out. All was quiet. She decided to go and find out what was happening, and she ran lightly upstairs to Mrs Gore-Smythe's sitting-room. She turned the handle of the door softly, lest Henrietta should really be asleep, and pushing it open a little way, she peeped in.

The first thing she saw was Mrs Goulburn standing by her mother.

"*Why! Aunt Jessie!*" she said, flinging open the door wide, and coming in. Then she caught sight of Henrietta's face, and she stopped short in consternation. "*Mother! O mother, what has happened?*" She looked again at Jessie, and saw corroboration of calamity in her face. "Aunt Jessie, what is it?"

"Shut the door, my child," said Mrs Goulburn.

Amaryllis obeyed hastily, and turned again towards them. What had happened? What could have happened? Was it Roger? An accident? But why had Aunt Jessie come?

The two women quailed before the girl, who stood looking from one to the other with apprehension in her hazel eyes. Jessie had not seen her for two years, and in that time she had changed from a child to a woman. The sight of the slim little figure in her light blue gown, with her quaint, irregular features and warm colouring, so like what she remembered and yet so different, appalled her. No! she had not realised what it meant to tell this girl. Face to face

with her, she had a new insight into Henrietta's anguish of mind.

And Henrietta was staring at her daughter stonily incapable of speech. There was Amaryllis! There she was! Actually before her!

In the momentary hesitation that held them Amaryllis grew white.

"Oh, what is it? Oh, please, do tell me!" she cried, clenching her fists and shaking them close to her breast.

"Shall I tell her?" asked Jessie.

Henrietta made no reply; she was swayed by alternating impulses. Jessie went forward and took Amaryllis's hand.

"My dear," she said, "there is something which you feel you ought to know, which——"

But Henrietta suddenly stood up.

"No!" she cried, almost with a scream. "This is nothing to do with you, Jessie!"

They both turned to look at her. She was staring quite straight and rigid; her fair hair was pushed back in disorder from her forehead; her eyelids were swollen and red, and there were pale grey shadows under her cheek bones; her lips were drooping in a tragic line.

Jessie dropped Amaryllis's hand and walked away to the window.

Henrietta held out her arms.

"Amaryllis! Come here!"

Amaryllis ran to her and flung her arms round her neck. Henrietta held her closely, bending her face down till her lips almost touched the girl's dark hair, which she pressed tenderly with one hand. She was talking low and quickly.

"Put your arms round me tightly, Amaryllis. Hold me fast just for once more, because presently you will shrink from me. Kiss me, my darling,

tell me you love me. I want you to say so! You do! You do! And I have no right to your love, darling, because I once did a dreadful thing! But you are my child, and I cannot let you go all at once, though I keep you mine only for a few minutes longer now. I can't help thinking of what you were like when you were a baby. You were such a little darling! Such a funny little dark-haired thing! And I was so surprised at being so happy! You couldn't have done without me! You were my own, my own! But now it is different. You are grown up, and if you choose to despise me, I cannot change you! I know I can't! I know I can't! When you know what I did you will feel quite differently towards me, though it happened before you were born, and all the time you have known me, all the time of your life, I have been a good woman. But they say I must tell you, even though it kills your love for me. It is such an easy thing to say 'Tell her,' and it can all be told in a few words, too, but afterwards you and I can never forget that it is told. They say it was wicked of me to marry and bring a little baby into the world, because of—because of what I did. They say I have done you a great injury. But I thought then that it could be buried and forgotten, and I wanted so much to be good and happy, and I thought I could be. Surely it is not deceiving to try to be good, when one has done something wrong once? Or must one be branded for ever and ever and ever?"

As it dawned upon Amaryllis that in some way her mother was contaminated, she was transfixed by an immense dread of what she was going to hear. Henrietta was holding her in a clasp so passionate that it almost hurt her, and the very eagerness of the low, hurried words filled her with apprehension. In the suspense a sensation of bodily weakness overcame

her, and involuntarily her arms round her mother's neck grew slack. It was terrible to be held as if in a vice, the revelation approaching—approaching and yet withheld.

She raised her face and tried to move, but her mother tightened her hold.

"Not yet! not yet! I can't tell you yet! a moment longer! Let me have your love and belief a moment longer. Amaryllis, I have brought you to love goodness. Remember that, when you want to blame me; remember that I have sheltered you and protected you from the knowledge of temptations; remember that you can't realise how much some women have to endure, and what it means when wrong-doing seems to be the only way of escape. You are such a child still—such an innocent child, and your innocence will make you hard."

Amaryllis could bear it no longer. With a sudden movement she raised her head from her mother's breast, and her hands resting on Henrietta's shoulders she leant back against her firm, encircling clasp and looked up in her face.

"Mother!" she implored, and Henrietta stopped speaking as if a blow had been dealt her. "Mother," asked Amaryllis, "what did you do?"

Henrietta let go of her, and Amaryllis also let her arms fall by her side. Jessie turned quickly round from the window.

"I killed my first husband," said Henrietta quietly. "I gave him poison."

Jessie came forward towards them.

Amaryllis and her mother remained motionless face to face. To both of them the words still hung in the air, the silence was full of their meaning.

All sorts of possibilities had rushed through Amaryllis's mind while her mother had held her, but *this* had never occurred to her.

It was—*murder*!

And her mother! Her mother, who was standing there in front of her, had committed a murder! She had poisoned her first husband! That vaguely unpleasing personality whom Amaryllis had summarily condemned for making her mother unhappy—he had been the victim of her mother's treachery!

"They tried me for it," said Henrietta, still quietly, "but they could not prove that I did it, and I was acquitted."

Amaryllis shuddered. Her mother had been tried for murder! If they had known the truth they would have—hanged her. Her eyes dilated and her lips grew white, but still she said nothing.

Henrietta turned away with a vague gesture of her hands, as if feeling for some support. She could not bear it! Why did not Amaryllis say something? A long, tremulous sob shook her.

"I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" she said, as if only stating a fact.

She covered her ears with her hands, and moved across the room. By the bookcase she stopped and leant her forehead against it, still stopping her ears with the palms of her hands.

Amaryllis turned towards her aunt. To deal death! To kill some one on purpose! To watch some one die, and know that one had planned it!

It was this that her mother had done—her mother whom she had looked up to all her life!

But her father? She thought of him with a ray of hope. He loved her mother. He had married her and had lived with her in close intimacy for twenty years. Did he condone such a crime? There must be some reason, then, for judging her gently.

"Father?" she asked. "Does he know?"

"Your father? Yes, he knows," said Jessie, "but — Child," she said, putting her hands upon

Amaryllis's shoulders, "your father has no right to blame her. When first they met, he had been in prison himself for a fraud."

All the room became dim and blurred to Amaryllis as if something had snapped behind her eyes. She wondered why she did not mind, and then she wondered what it was that had been told her. She knew that she had heard quite distinctly, and she knew that she had understood when Aunt Jessie had spoken, but she could no longer remember what was that had been said because of the singing in her ears. Besides, she was terribly tired and sick. She heard Aunt Jessie's voice speaking to her a long way off, and then all life seemed to slip from her, and she was so thankful to let it ebb away!

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CHAPTER XVIII

As Amaryllis recovered consciousness, she noticed that her forehead was wet, and she smelt eau-de-cologne. She opened her eyes and saw that it was dusk. The window was a cold, bleak blue, and there was a spreading square of firelight on the ceiling. Her limbs were heavy with fatigue; she was unwilling to make any movement or even speak. Then she perceived that she was lying on the sofa in Henrietta's sitting-room. She looked round for her mother, but it was her Aunt Jessie who was standing beside her. For a moment she could not think why Mrs Goulburn should be there. Then she remembered.

"Are you better, my dear?" asked Jessie, and she gave her *sal volatile* to drink. It did her good, but with her returning vitality came a craving to cry, and she shaded her eyes with one hand to hide the brimming tears.

Jessie sat down by her side and waited.

Amaryllis did not cry for long. There was too much to think about, and the intentness of her pre-occupation dried the source of her tears.

Her mother's image was vividly before her mind, familiar in every gesture, only unfamiliar in the passionate pleading that had preceded her confession. She thought of Henrietta as she came down in the morning fresh, brisk and unconcerned; or as she sat by the fire reading some book that amused her, and commenting upon it with appreciative enjoyment; or again as she sprang up, eagerly cordial, to greet

some guest. She recollected how her mother had welcomed Aunt Jessie the last time she had come. Aunt Jessie who *knew*!

"Have you always known?" she asked, marvelling. Jessie laid her hand upon Amaryllis's.

"I didn't know for certain that she had done until after she was acquitted," she replied, "then she told me. Of course, I was with her all through the trial."

The mention of the trial brought home the actual with fresh vividness to the girl. To be tried, knowing that one was guilty! How awful, how awful it must have been! How could she have endured it! How could she have ever recovered from it! And yet—more Amaryllis thought of it the more incapable she felt of realising it! How could she associate with her mother she knew, and always had known, with crime! How could she believe what she had been told?

But then, it was her mother herself who had told her. She recalled the scene she had just been through with a feeling of aloofness from it. Her mother's pleading had left her curiously untouched. Rather the very vehemence had served to stir her expectation of horror, and to emphasise it when it came. But Henrietta had also been revealed in a new light, and in thinking of the miserable, haggard woman into which her mother had been transformed, Amaryllis felt that the confession was not so incredible after all.

Then she suddenly remembered how she had asked Henrietta if she had not been glad when her husband had died, and in reply her mother had explained quite calmly that death was always inspiring, and that one could not be glad even when somebody one disliked had died! She had said *She* who had been the cause of his dying!

Yet it was probably quite true. Amaryllis

perceive that this had very likely been her mother's real frame of mind at the time. She could well imagine that the event had appeared to Henrietta quite other than she had expected.

The strange thing was that she should say so! Did it mean that she did not care? Obviously not; her present misery contradicted any such doubt. Was it part, then, of an elaborate system of deception, of concealment? Amaryllis shuddered at the thought, and then discarded it. Her father might scheme and carry out a scheme, but her mother?—No; she was certain that her mother believed in herself; she was certain of it, from her daily intercourse with Henrietta, from her recollection of a hundred little things she said and did, from Henrietta's very efficiency in the position she filled.

What would people say if they knew? What would the Lloyds say?

What would Kenneth Rodwell say if he were there now? With a sudden flash of insight she guessed that he would be *amused*! She could imagine the gleam of laughter in his eyes, and she felt as angry with him as if he were actually present. She remembered how he had once said that there was nothing, no matter how solemn or tragic, that could not be regarded humorously if one chose to see the laughable side. She checked herself. She felt it was imperative to forget Kenneth, and to keep her attention from wandering.

"Aunt Jessie, will you tell me about it?" she said, and Mrs Goulburn gave her a brief account of what had happened. As the story was unfolded the conviction grew upon her that her mother was essentially the same now that she had been twenty-one years ago. The charming triviality which had made the idea of so great a crime doubly shocking was the very thing that had led her to commit

it. Again Amaryllis saw her mother in a new light if she had perceived her triviality before, it had been subconsciously, but now she discovered that Henrietta's very efficiency was trivial.

As Amaryllis listened, a sense of moral solitude settled upon her, and her father's dishonesty, which concerned her less because she had never cared for him as she cared for Henrietta, completed her feeling of destitution. She recognised how dependent she had been upon her regard for them. To be sure, she had rebelled against the conventionality of their precepts, but she had taken it for granted that they were good and admirable people, and however much she had questioned their judgment incidentally, in the only two crises of her life she had yielded to their influence.

Then with a sudden alertness of all her faculties she thought of Sir Roger. Why had she not thought of him before? Her conscience accused her. It seemed almost treachery to him not to have realised at once that it would make a difference to him. Of course! Of course! She began to understand.

"I see," she said; "you told me because of my engagement."

Jessie pressed her hand, and fumbling for her handkerchief, she furtively blew her nose.

"You think he will not want to marry me more," said Amaryllis, pursuing her new idea with excitement.

"It does not follow, my child," said Jessie, anxious to encourage hope, and Amaryllis felt an unexplained desire to protest.

Did it not follow? Did it not? But it *would* follow if the younger Lady Scrymgeour had the power to decide. *She* would have no hesitation. In her position such a parentage would be an ineradicable blemish.

But Sir Roger? No, Aunt Jessie was right.

would not allow it to make any difference in their relations. But he would *mind*. He would never forgive her father and mother; he would hate their crimes, and hate the advantage they had taken of him. He would feel himself tricked. Probably he would separate her from them, and make it a condition that she should never see them again.

Somehow she resented the probability of this attitude more than she did the thought of Kenneth's amusement. Sir Roger would act with generosity, but he would condemn uncompromisingly, while the very fact that Kenneth would perceive the humour of the situation gave her confidence that his judgment would be humane; possibly more humane than her own. Although she herself was profoundly horrified, she was ready to demand passionately that others should be lenient to her mother.

The room was quite dark now except for the flicker of the fire. Amaryllis was glad of the darkness and of her own inertia; together they seemed to procure her a respite before she need act.

The question that harassed her above all others was whether this crime, committed so long ago, made her mother "a wicked woman"? According to her upbringing *by* Henrietta, Henrietta was undoubtedly condemned. No one would *call upon* a murderess, even if the crime were twenty years old. And her father would be equally an outcast from society. But this would be only partially on account of the sinfulness of their deed; it was the publicity that was unpardonable. The standard of respectability made her indignant, and she remembered with gratitude how Kenneth had once said that a whopping crime, as he expressed it, might indicate less moral obliquity than a selfish or dishonest point of view. Surely one might commit an action of great and even far-reaching evil and recover from it, as if from an illness?

Would it not be very unjust to disregard the long years of decorum that had elapsed since it happened?

But then this decorum was founded on deceit; it was achieved by shirking the price of what they had done. No; that was not altogether fair, for they had both suffered: both had been publicly tried, and her father had been condemned; both had been obliged to start life afresh. And then perhaps there were occasions when concealment was *right*.

How perplexing it all was! She reiterated the problem she was trying to solve. Why should it be ridiculous that Henrietta, who had committed murder, should think it wrong for a woman to smoke a cigarette? Why should it be absurd for Mr. Smythe, who had defrauded people of their money, to disapprove of Kenneth Rodwell, because Kenneth doubted the morality of wealth? Because her parents had sinned in the past, were they therefore not competent to form moral judgments?

Then she understood that in her heart of hearts she believed them to be essentially unchanged. They had simply put on respectability as they put on new clothes.

"And what if they have!" she thought bitterly. "Conventional virtue only amounts to being well-dressed. They are no worse than scores of other people."

"Aunt Jessie," she said aloud, "mother would have told me if you had not made her?"

Mrs. Goulburn, still shattered by the sight of Henrietta's misery, could not bear the imputation of accusation.

"Amaryllis," she exclaimed, "think what it would do to her to have to tell you! It was bad enough for me, but——" Her voice shook, and she did not finish her sentence.

Amaryllis felt a stab of compunction. Her honesty had made her hard. She had thought she could sum up Henrietta's attitude to life as a sham, but she realised that the false and the real were inextricably mixed. She had overlooked the added anguish of Henrietta's confession to her own child. For the first time her mother's pleading affected her, and the tears suddenly filled her eyes and poured down her cheeks.

Henrietta had cried out that when she knew, the relations between them would never be the same again; and Amaryllis echoed the cry with the ache of a deep regret. Was that true? Was all confidence between her and her pretty mother dead? Could they love each other as before, with the knowledge of this between them?

Then the practical question troubled her. How was she to behave now to her parents? Could she kiss her mother morning and evening, knowing that she was a murderess?

"You have known all these years," she said to her aunt, "and has it made no difference?"

Jessie hesitated.

"I suppose it has made some difference," she replied. "Yes, of course it has. But," she burst out with sudden vehemence, "I have *always* loved your mother."

Amaryllis was glad. In spite of all, Aunt Jessie had loved her, and still loved her! Aunt Jessie, who had been acquainted with *him*, the man she had killed, who had been with her through the trial, who knew everything against her that was to be known!

But even as the thoughts passed through her mind she shuddered. Nothing could change the fact! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Involuntarily she put her hands over her face.

Of course, if she married Sir Roger all would become simple, and she was certain from her knowledge of him, that if she chose she could surely be his wife. As Lady Scrymgeour she would be safe. No one need ever suspect the truth, and she would be removed from the sordid makeshift of her home life that otherwise lay before her. She had a vivid conception of this other life that awaited her in the beautiful old house, with all the romance of an inherited position, and all the outward beauty and refinements of material existence. She would be sheltered and protected, Sir Roger her devoted companion instead of Mr and Mrs Gore-Smythe.

Then, quite unexpectedly, and with an immediate feeling of relief, she discovered that she did not want to marry Sir Roger. She discovered that she had accepted him because *he* loved her, and she had thought it was the same thing as loving *him*. Her mother had encouraged her to think so; she now perceived that though her feeling for him might have been enough under the former circumstances, it was no longer enough. Whatever might urge, she could not marry him now.

Meanwhile, Jessie was thinking of Henrietta.

"Remember, Amaryllis," she said with emphasis, "she is much better than your father is—much better. If only she could have married a really good man, she would have responded to his influence, and so easily!"

"Does father know you have told me?" asked Amaryllis, apprehensive of a possible interview with him.

"I think not," replied Mrs Goulburn. "I have never seen him. And I'm sure she will not have told anything. I think—she seems to dread his knowledge that she has told you."

Amaryllis understood that very well.

"I don't see that he need know," she said thoughtfully. "At any rate, not yet." She paused. "You see, Aunt Jessie," she went on, "there is no reason, is there, for any one to know besides Sir Roger?"

"Most certainly not!" said Jessie emphatically.

"I shan't marry Sir Roger now," said Amaryllis; "and of course I shall have to——"

Jessie could not bear to think that the engagement should be broken, and interrupted her.

"Oh, my darling, don't say that!"

"But I mean it," said Amaryllis.

"Of course, darling, he must know," said Jessie, "but——"

"Please don't," interrupted Amaryllis. "I—I don't want to marry him. I thought I did, but I made a mistake."

"But, Amaryllis——"

"I mean it," she insisted. "But about father—there is no need for him to know, unless—well, unless we're obliged to tell him."

She dreaded her father's anger, even though he could not visit it upon herself, but Jessie assented half-heartedly. She could not help wishing that Frank should receive his share of humiliation. However, she was ready to agree to anything that would spare Henrietta a moment's further pain.

"Will *you* tell mother?" said Amaryllis.

Jessie hesitated.

"Won't you—couldn't you see her yourself?" she pleaded diffidently.

Amaryllis's first impulse was to cry out that such a request was cruel, and then her conscience stabbed her. What was her mother enduring all this time?

"Where is she?" she asked.

"She went away to her room," said Jessie; "she is waiting for you—till you——"

Had the moment come when she must commit

herself to a course of action? What was she to do? What was she to do? Could they resume relations if nothing had happened?

"God help me to think!" she cried inwardly. "only I could understand!"

But nothing had actually happened. She knew something more about her mother; that was all. A shadow out of the distant past had taken shape between them, but it was a *shadow*.

Her natural horror of the deed, of any one who could do such a deed, swayed her. Her mother was contaminated! How could she speak to her? How could she approach her without shuddering?

But after all, it had happened before she had been born. Had she any right to say to the mother she had loved all her life: "I cannot love you any more because of what you did before I was born?"

Aunt Jessie had always loved her, and truly there was something very lovable about her.

Amaryllis sat up on the sofa, and stared at the dusky furniture looming in the firelight. She had solved nothing. Her judgment, her imagination were baffled, but she knew how she intended to act. The knowledge had damaged her like a blow, but mother was mother, and needed her now more than she had ever needed her before.

She got up, and feeling for Jessie where she patiently in the dark corner by the sofa, she put her arms round her neck.

"How kind you have been!" she sighed.

Jessie clung to her and wept.

"You will go to her?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Amaryllis.

CHAPTER XIX

DURING several waking intervals, which made that night seem strangely long, Amaryllis made up her mind to tell the younger Lady Scrymgeour of her decision to break her engagement. Sir Roger was away; he would not be back at Wrottle End until Saturday, and she could not wait till then. Nor could she explain to him in writing; she could not bring herself to put the words upon paper. Of course, she might telegraph to him to come back sooner, but she shrank from facing him. She was afraid of his imperious questions. She could scarcely avoid referring to some part of the circumstances that had brought her to this determination, but what if he forced her to own the actual facts? She would have to oppose him, to rouse his anger, his obstinacy! She would have to answer his pleading, to combat his love! No! She had not the courage! Probably he would insist on seeing her even though she went first to Lady Scrymgeour, but then at least she would not have to announce her intention. He would know it, and know it from some one who would be upon *her* side. She also felt vaguely that Lady Scrymgeour's adoration of her son should count for something.

The next day Henrietta stayed in bed. When Amaryllis had gone into her room the evening before, she had given way completely. Now she was very quiet, but exacting. She could hardly bear to let Amaryllis out of her sight, but lay there holding her

hand and silently gazing at her, as if to assure her that her child did not mean to spurn her.

About half-way through the morning she was persuaded to let Jessie take Amaryllis's place by her side. Her old habit of dependence upon her sister revived as it always did in moments of emotional stress. She might resent Jessie's interference, but she could never definitely quarrel with her. The two sisters were on terms that apparently nothing could really undermine.

As Amaryllis crossed the hall to start on her way to Wrottle End, her father came out of the study.

"How have you left mother now?" he asked ponderously anxious.

Amaryllis tried not to shrink from him.

"I think she is a little better," she replied. "I hope she is going to sleep," she added, to deter him from going to Henrietta.

"This is most unfortunate," he said, frowning. "If she is not better this evening I shall send for the doctor. As it happens, it is really quite a good thing that your Aunt Jessie should have turned up just now."

Amaryllis said nothing, but opened the front door and went out.

It was bitterly cold. The sky was overcast and the wind was penetrating, but the hedgerows and trees were coming into leaf; a few primroses were out on the banks, and the grass was a vivid green.

As Amaryllis walked along the road between the lines of gaunt, over-arching trees, she was in a condition almost of exaltation. She had got this thing done, and all her energies were concentrated upon the ordeal that lay before her.

What was she going to say to Lady Scrymgeour? She did not know. Lady Scrymgeour did not know her—she would be glad that Roger should not marry her. Amaryllis wondered whether she would

kind, what she would say, and then again and again she asked herself how she was going to tell her.

She was facing the wind until she turned into the drive, but there all was calm and silent. Her heart sank with a feeling of solitude. She stood still, and she could hear the sighing of the wind in the branches far above the great motionless tree-trunks around her.

This was a haven—a haven where she might find a refuge if she chose.

She walked on and came in sight of the house. What was Lady Scrymgeour doing now? She would be vexed at being asked to receive a visitor in the morning, even though it were her future daughter-in-law.

How majestic the old house was! How strange to think it might have been her home! Probably after to-day she would never enter it again.

She went up the steps to the front door and rang the bell. Here she was once more exposed to the wind; the gust hummed in her ears, her skirt was blown fluttering to one side, and she bent her head and pressed her elbows in close to her sides as she waited in the cold for the servant to come.

She asked for Lady Scrymgeour, and was shown into the empty drawing-room. Here she waited again, standing in the centre of the room, every nerve alert with expectation.

The footman returned and asked her to go to Lady Scrymgeour in her sitting-room.

She followed him upstairs. He flung open the door of the boudoir, and she went in.

Amy was sitting in a chintz-covered armchair by the fire; she laid aside some needlework, and smilingly held out her hand without rising. Amaryllis went to her and took her hand, but she did not kiss her, and Lady Scrymgeour did not notice the omission.

"How brave of you to come out on such a morning," she said, inwardly hoping that Amaryllis did not intend to make a practice of coming so early. "Come and sit down and get warm. Take off your coat, dear. It's colder than ever, isn't it? Isn't it dreadful to think of all the tender young shoots and buds?"

Amaryllis slipped off her fur coat and sat down in an old-fashioned wicker-seated chair close to Lady Scrymgeour.

She was impressed by the atmosphere of domesticity. She was impressed by the outward appearance of tranquillity, of secluded comfort, of intimate intercourse. They were two women sitting by the fire to talk together; that was all.

She did not hesitate; she went to the point at once. "Lady Scrymgeour," she said quietly, her eyes fixed on the fire, "I have come to tell you that I cannot marry Sir Roger."

Amy's surprise was that of hearing news which seemed too good to be true. Was it possible? Why? She was a little troubled lest her feelings on the matter had been too apparent and had offended the girl, though certainly that was not very likely. She did not believe Amaryllis to be sensitive.

Amaryllis looked up and found Lady Scrymgeour's eyes fixed intently upon her.

"I will tell you why," she said gently, and she paused. For a moment she felt as if she had undertaken more than she could bear, and then her pride nerved her. Though she was trembling, though she was twisting her clasped fingers together, she continued to speak quite collectedly.

"I thought I loved him, because I do so adore and revere him," she said, "but something happened to show me that even if he should feel it right to marry me, I couldn't let him. I have been living in a dream lately."

She looked away again towards the fire.

Amy was puzzled, but she took credit to herself for her discernment. She had known at the time that Amaryllis did not love him. She had been sure of it. But what had happened to make the girl herself see it? It was so unexpected that a daughter of the Gore-Smythes should draw back from so advantageous a marriage. Her prejudice against the whole family made her suspicious of something underhand.

"Does Roger know this?" she asked coldly.

The colour rushed into Amaryllis's face.

"No," she said. "I—I thought I had better come to you first."

Amy drew herself up. Her suspicions were confirmed. Probably it *was* because the girl had seen her disapprobation and was scheming to get the better of her in this way.

"Really——" she began, but Amaryllis, seeing her stiffen, went on quickly.

"O Lady Scrymgeour, don't look like that! I didn't know when I said I would marry him that I didn't care in that way. I know it must seem dreadful to you, but——"

Lady Scrymgeour scrutinised her doubtfully. She was glad, she was relieved; but not entirely. Her feelings were mixed. What would Roger say? What right had this chit of a girl to make him suffer as she knew he must suffer?

"Of course, you must judge for yourself," she said coldly. "But I confess this sudden change of feeling is a little difficult to understand."

"I don't think it is change of feeling," said Amaryllis. "I believe I never—cared—in that way, but I thought—I thought——"

Lady Scrymgeour did not help her. She was trying to grasp the idea that any girl could be

unwilling to marry Roger. She could not believe there must be something else at the bottom of this apparent fickleness. She scrutinised the girl closely, and noticed that she looked very tired. Surely, this could not have come from any interference on the part of her parents? Far more likely she had battled with them to escape marriage. But that again would be astonishingly nearly incredible! She could not help feeling it was almost a slight to Roger, and she was a little resentful. Was it possible that the girl had realised her unsuitability, and had come there for a fit of genuine humility for counsel?

"What do your father and mother say?" she asked.

Amaryllis winced painfully and did not answer. Amy's curiosity was roused. Her feelings softened a little towards the girl, and her intense desire to know the real facts of the case felt like sympathy.

"My dear," she said, almost tenderly, "will you speak openly? Won't you tell me what has happened to make you change your mind?"

Amaryllis glanced at her with a look of alarm and terror in her eyes.

"I can't," she said.

Then Lady Scrymgeour's ideas leapt to a new view of the situation. What if the girl had found out something about her parents! Good Heaven! Really, it seemed a likely explanation!

But the Gore-Smythes! People who had been received everywhere, who had lived there so long that they were almost an institution! Surely in such a case one must have heard something against them. There must have been some gossip? And yet—

"My dear," she said, "forgive me, but I am helping guess a great deal. It is not idle curiosity. You must remember that this concerns me nearly."

"Lady Scrymgeour," said Amaryllis simply, "we have treated you—and Sir Roger—very badly. If he had known all about us he would never have allowed himself to care for me. This need not have happened. It ought not to have happened."

Then her guess was right! Then there was something against them! Of course, it could be only one thing. Lady Scrymgeour jumped to the conclusion that their sin had been the more usual breach of morals. In spite of herself she was deeply interested. Mrs Gore-Smythe acquired all at once an immense, if repulsive, distinction. She was a woman who had suffered and had dared to do wrong; she was different from the rest of the world. Amy felt some involuntary sympathy for her. She was sure that she could understand what Mrs Gore-Smythe had endured, because she too had cared for a man who was not her husband. But this same reason also made her contemptuous and merciless, because *she* had not swerved one fraction from the path of decorum, and scarcely a soul even guessed what she had been through.

As Amaryllis had foreseen, Lady Scrymgeour perceived nothing of the humour nor of the pathos in her parents' aspirations for respectability; she only felt that a monstrous deception had been practised upon the neighbourhood. How had these people dared to come amongst them on equal terms? How had they dared offer their unclean hands in greeting? They had assumed the outward varnish of virtue, and many people, in ignorance of what they were, had actually become their close friends!

That, at least, *she* had never done. She took credit to herself that she had consistently disliked them. She could not restrain a thrill of triumph at the justification of her prejudice!

And, naturally, *their* daughter was tarnished by

their impurity. She believed in heredity. She believed in birth. Doubtless it was an innate want of moral refinement that she had detected in this girl.

Of course the marriage could not go on now. She could not help being glad in spite of what Roger would feel. She glanced round the room with a new satisfaction. She would not now have to share her home with a daughter of the Gore-Smythes. She would not have to admit a daughter of the Gore-Smythes into intimacy, nor to yield her place to her as mistress of Wrottle End.

But she owned that Amaryllis was behaving well. She owned it reluctantly, but after a slight struggle her sense of justice asserted itself. Of course, no one with any conscience would have withheld the knowledge; so far, Amaryllis was only doing her duty. But Amy admired the way she appreciated the stigma upon herself, accepting the consequences asking for no commiseration. She had begun saying that she would not marry Roger; and had chosen to tell the person the least likely to sympathise with her. She must have known that she had gone first to Roger he would have refused to agree to her renunciation. Amy could not believe that Amaryllis really did not want to marry Roger. Putting on one side the fact that he was himself, a marriage would mean everything to her in that position.

Lady Scrymgeour could not yet bring herself to say anything, though the silence in the room irritated her. Amaryllis, however, was thankful for the silence. She dreaded having to speak again, she dreaded having to reply to questions, she dreaded having to explain. Her attention was idly awake to the details of her surroundings. The room was pretty; the flame of the fire was comfortable; the chair she sat in was restful; outside the window there

a mulberry tree, and the branches were rustling softly and incessantly.

Lady Scrymgeour was much disturbed. What would this poor girl's future be? Was she to spend the greater part of her life with such a father and mother? At one blow, her faith in her nearest relations had been shattered, and her hopes of happiness ruined.

And there was good in her. She was better than her environment. Amy felt that she had never liked her so well as at this moment.

But the trouble was that these considerations would affect Roger. Probably he would insist upon marrying her, and indeed, who could blame her if she allowed herself to be over-persuaded?

She glanced at Amaryllis, and at the sight of her quiescence pity overcame her. Tears filled her eyes, and one rolled slowly down her cheek. She was very tenderhearted to any suffering that she saw before her. She could not bear to add to this poor child's distress.

At last she spoke.

"My dear," she said, "I think I understand. May I say how much I appreciate your self-sacrifice?"

"It is not self-sacrifice," said Amaryllis quickly. "Don't think me better than I am. I do not want to marry him. Surely there is no more to be said?"

"But, Amaryllis, have you thought of what Roger will say?" said Lady Scrimgeour, stung by her manner into plain speaking. "It cannot end with your telling *me*."

"You mean I shall have to see him?" asked Amaryllis.

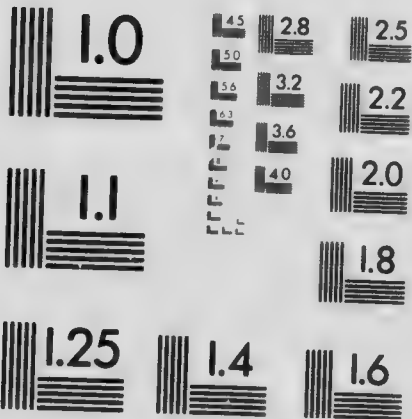
Lady Scrymgeour made a gesture of assent.

Amaryllis hesitated. She was afraid of Sir Roger. She had meant to appeal to Lady Scrymgeour to



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support her against his insistence. But face to face with her, the intention died away in a feeling of antagonism.

"I cannot say more than I have already said," said Amaryllis.

"He is very generous, and he is in love," murmured Amy, thinking aloud.

"You need not be afraid," replied Amaryllis bitterly. Lady Scrymgeour was vexed with herself. She had not meant to wound her, but she was afraid Roger would prevail against the girl's better judgment.

They were both silent again. Then Amaryllis stood up. Amy also rose slowly, and for a moment they faced each other without speaking.

"Will you tell him?" said Amaryllis in a low voice. "I—I can't. I will see him afterwards—must."

Lady Scrymgeour suddenly took the girl in her arms.

"You poor little thing!" she said huskily.

But Amaryllis gently extricated herself from the embrace.

"Good-bye," she said, in her most matter-of-fact voice, and she slipped out of the room, while Lady Scrymgeour walked away to the window, wiping her eyes.

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CHAPTER XX

AMARYLLIS told no one of her visit to Lady Scrymgeour. Jessie suspected that she had been there, but Henrietta did not even realise that Amaryllis had been out of the house during the time that she had left her that morning. Amaryllis was sure that Sir Roger would insist upon seeing her, and until the interview was over, she could bear no comment on the situation.

As the day advanced Henrietta revived a little. She sat up in bed, propped by big frilled pillows; her hair was covered by a lace fichu, the pointed ends of which hung down on each side of her face, and she was wearing a pink silk quilted dressing-jacket. She looked haggard and drawn; her eyes still followed Amaryllis's every movement, and her right hand lay constantly outstretched on the counterpane in mute invitation if her child left her side for one moment.

Amaryllis spent all the afternoon with her. She could not feel any horror of her while she looked like that; she could not blame her. However much she might shudder at the thought of the actual deed, it was, after all, a thing of the past, and her experience of it was no more than a mental conception. But her mother's silent misery was before her, she had heard her mother's passionate pleading, and it was the present suffering that concerned her, far more than the sinfulness of the past crime.

Jessie sat knitting a stocking in front of the fire. They did not talk.

Once Amaryllis became obsessed by the conscious-

ness that her mother's hand was the same that had dealt death, and she tried to move away; Henrietta's clutch tightened in desperation, and the girl's compassion for her reasserted itself. Then again, the silence and inactivity became intolerable; she felt that she must get something to do, or that she would scream. Once more she tried to remove her hand, and once more Henrietta's hot fingers tightened on it with a strong grip.

"I only want to fetch some work," said Amaryllis, but her mother would not let her go, and she became passive again.

A little before half-past four the maid came to say what Mrs Gore-Smythe would like for tea. Amaryllis replied fretfully that she did not want anything, but Jessie intervened.

"You had better have something," she said. "I will have tea with you. I daresay you will feel more inclined for it when it is here. Yes; bring tea to us all up here, please."

"How it blows!" said Amaryllis, as a loud wind roared in the chimney.

"It really is dreadful," said Jessie conversationally. "And, unfortunately, the buds have begun to come out. I'm afraid it will do a great deal of harm. I think the springs get worse every year."

Tea arrived, and the tray was placed on a small round table by Mrs Goulburn. She rolled up her knitting, and bent down to peer at the flame of the spirit-lamp; it was not burning well, and she put it up with one of her steel knitting-pins. Then she made tea with a business-like disregard of any unusual in their relations. Henrietta consented to take a cup from Amaryllis and a hot scone.

"I ought to be doing all that, Aunt Jessie," said Amaryllis, standing by the table as Mrs Goulburn poured out some tea for her.

"Well, my dear, you can have a holiday to-day," said Jessie, handing it to her. She then took a scone herself and began to eat it.

"What a good cook you have, Henrietta," she exclaimed. "I wish our woman could bake like this. She's quite a *fair* cook, and a nice, dependable creature, but these are unusually good. I wish you would let me have the recipe. Dick would love them."

There was a pause.

"Do you think Kitty will like going to college?" asked Amaryllis, referring to Jessie's eldest girl.

"Oh, she is wild to go!" replied Mrs Goulburn. "I don't think I altogether like the idea of it, but as your uncle says, all the nonsense that is put into her in the term will be knocked out of her again in the holidays. Come in!" she called out in answer to a knock at the door.

It was Mr Gore-Smythe.

"I don't see being left out in the cold," he said. "Why shouldn't *I* have tea up here too?" He approached his wife. "Well, darling, how are you now? Better? That's right!" He went to the fire, rubbing his hands. "Is there a cup of tea for me?"

"I'll ring for one," said Amaryllis, jumping up and going to the bell.

"Thank you, my lady," he said gaily, and the three women flushed crimson.

"What weather! Upon my soul, what weather!" he went on, turning round, and standing with his back to the fire, his hands under his coat-tails. "You've got a chill, you know, Henrietta. *You* ought to be careful, Amaryllis. I don't think it was a fit morning for you to go out."

The maid entered in answer to the bell.

"Another cup, please," said Amaryllis.

Henrietta fixed her large, light eyes upon daughter.

"*Did* you go out?" she asked suspiciously.

"Yes," said Amaryllis, and she was aware Jessie too was scrutinising her.

"Yes, she went out," said Mr Gore-Smythe, "I don't think it was wise. It's one of her weaknesses, you know, Jessie, to go out however bad the weather just because ordinary, sensible people would not. Now, what could be the pleasure of walking on such a day, except the pleasure of the contrary?"

The maid returned with the cup, and Amaryllis bent over the tray to fill it up.

"Thank you, my love," he said, as she brought it to him. "Where did you go?"

"I went to Wrottle End," she replied, turning away to fetch the dish of scones. Henrietta did not move or speak, but her face changed strangely; every muscle seemed to become rigid. Jessie picked up her knitting hastily and dropped two stitches.

"How iresome!" she exclaimed.

"Wrottle End?" echoed Mr Gore-Smythe, as he took a scone. "Bless me! Couldn't you have stayed away from the house, even though he is not here? I suppose you went to see Lady Scrymgeour?"

"Yes."

"Well, my child, of course you're right to go to her," he said, "but I must say it strikes me as an unnecessary attention, considering her position to you. You must hold your own against her. I know. Don't let her ride rough-shod over you."

Again there was a knock at the door, and a group of women looked towards it with alacrity, and called out:

"Come in!"

The maid entered.

"If you please, m'm, Sir Roger Scrymgeour is asking for Miss Amaryllis."

There was a dead silence.

"*What's that?*" exclaimed Frank. "Sir Roger? But I thought——"

Amaryllis fled out of the room, and Mr Gore-Smythe burst into hearty laughter.

"Well, upon my word! I thought Scrymgeour was past the age of such lover-like extravagances. But you *never* know! And as to my lady! Why, she ran off in a lamentably undignified way! I shall tell her that she must learn deportment."

He laughed again, and, strolling to the table, put down his cup.

"More tea?" asked Mrs Goulburn, with a jerk.

"No thanks. No more."

He settled himself in an armchair close to the fire, from which he could see both his wife and sister-in-law, and, leaning back, he crossed his legs.

"How these young people grow up!" he remarked. "In a couple of days Amaryllis will be twenty, and here she is engaged to be married. Why, it seems only the other day that she was a baby! I suppose Kitty will be getting engaged next. Does she show any sign of it yet?"

Jessie had succeeded in picking up one stitch, and was now intent on arresting the downward course of the other.

"Kitty? Oh, no! No, no!" she replied, without looking up.

"I hope Amaryllis is not too much in love to think of giving him tea," said Mr Gore-Smythe. "I wonder how he managed to get away? I know when he went to town yesterday he did not expect to be down again till Saturday."

Henrietta and Jessie looked at each other furtively,

but Frank was gazing into the fire, his finger-tips pressed together.

"It is a great satisfaction to us," he said, "to give her into the care of so admirable a man. She is a good girl—a very good girl—but she is apt to go off at a tangent after some folly or other. She gets hold of an idea, you know, and then she does everything. Contact with him will soon cure her of posing."

"I've never seen Amaryllis pose," said Mrs. Goulburn, with some viciousness of manner. "She is much too honest. If she seems unconventional, it is because she is so simple and direct."

Frank laughed patronisingly.

"That's a very kind way of putting it," he said, "but I'm afraid you are judging only from superficial indications. However, it's no more than a little school-girl silliness. I suppose some sort of silliness is inevitable, however carefully a girl is brought up. But it's transitory—quite transitory. Matrimony will soon set it right. Don't you think so, Henrietta?"

"What?" said Henrietta mechanically. She was crumpling the edge of the sheet in her fingers, watching him as if fascinated.

"By the way, I've got an article coming out in the *Fortnightly*," continued Mr Gore-Smythe. "It was partly suggested to me by watching Amaryllis. 'Conscientious Fads, and how far they are justified for permanent use.' My idea is, that they are not so harmful in the main, because they are based on a perverted point of view."

"Jessie," murmured Henrietta, and Mrs Goulburn went to her quickly. "How can I bear it?" she whispered.

"Shall I send him away?" whispered Jessie, tending to arrange the pillows. "Is that right?" she asked aloud.

"No, no," whispered Henrietta. "What *can* be happening downstairs?"

"Getting tired, darling?" asked Frank. "Would you like me to go?"

"No, Frank, no," she said; "I should like you to stay. I'm not tired."

"What do *you* think, Jessie?" he asked. "Shall I stay?"

"Oh yes," said Mrs Goulburn.

"And what about the doctor?" he went on. "Don't you think it would be well to send for him? Aha!" he exclaimed, as the door opened, "here is my lady back again! Well, and for how long has he left you this time?"

Amaryllis advanced quickly into the room. She was wearing that afternoon a dark blue silk blouse and a serge skirt of the same colour. Her face was flushed; her heavy dark hair had evidently been pushed away from her forehead, and fallen back again a little ruffled. Her hazel eyes under her thick black brows were alert with a firm determination.

She stood still at the foot of her mother's bed.

"I have broken off my engagement," she said.

Frank bounded out of his chair.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

"*Amaryllis!*" moaned Henrietta, and putting her hands over her face, she began to cry weakly.

"My dear child!" said Jessie, rising to her feet in distress.

"What—*what* do you mean?" burst out Frank.

"What—what—Good Heavens!"

"I have told him I do not want to marry him," said Amaryllis, trembling but collected.

Frank struggled with his amazement and his anger in an intense desire to act judiciously.

"Oh," he said, after a moment, "I see. A lover's quarrel! But, my dear child, you must really learn

a little more self-control. How could you come and make such an announcement to your mother when she is ill. Of course, I understand you are naturally upset, but it'll be all right! Bless me, yes! Come downstairs with me, and tell me what's happened and we'll talk it over together."

"No! No!" cried Henrietta in terror. "Don't go! Amaryllis, you mustn't go! You mustn't leave me!"

"But, my love——" protested Frank; but Henrietta only held out her hands to her child.

"Amaryllis!" she implored.

The girl went to her, and, sitting on the edge of the bed, placed her hand in her mother's.

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"Shall I go?" asked Jessie.

"There is no need," said Henrietta despondently.

Amaryllis looked straight into her father's face.

"There is no quarrel," she said; "something snowed me—— I have found out that I do not really love him, and I have told him so."

Mr Gore-Smythe became crimson, and he lost his self-control.

"Are you *mad*?" he asked in a fury.

"Is *that* what you told him?" asked Henrietta feverishly.

Frank began to pace up and down, kicking the furniture out of his way, and uttering angry ejaculations. "Good Heavens! Upon my word! Monstrous! Good Heavens!"

He stood still before Amaryllis.

"Have you no sense of honour? Have you no idea of what is due to Sir Roger? Do you think that you can agree to marry a man one week and change your mind the next for a mere whim? You don't love him? My good girl, you don't know your own mind. Of course you love him! No one can observe you

together for one minute without seeing that you do!"

He paused, but she made no answer.

"I see what it is," he said; "you've been reading foolish, unwholesome trash, and because you've got some absurd idea into your head about love, you are going to throw over the best match in the neighbourhood.—A man whom every one looks up to! A man who is devoted to you! A man to whom I could give you without a qualm!—positively without a qualm! My dear child, you cannot behave like this! I simply cannot allow you to break *his* heart, and ruin your own happiness."

"I explained to Sir Roger. He was very good to me," said Amaryllis. "As soon as he understood—what I felt—he went away."

Frank gazed at her, frowning and rubbing his chin. He was convinced that if he set the right way to work he could prevent this disaster.

"Why, you silly child, he could hardly do otherwise if you told him you didn't love him——" he began.

"And I did tell him so," cried Amaryllis vehemently, "and it is true."

"Nonsense!" shouted her father, and strode across the room again. He came back to her and resumed more quietly. "Now look here. You must understand that young women cannot make engagements and break them again just for the fun of it——"

"Father!" cried Amaryllis, her eyes flashing, but he paid no attention to her.

"You like and respect Sir Roger; you liked him enough to have accepted him when he proposed, and that after due consideration. You did not act on the spur of the moment. I know him to be the most honourable and high-minded of men, and I have no hesitation in telling you that you have absolutely no right to behave as you are doing. Even if you think

you are not *in love* with him, that is no adequate reason for drawing back now. For one thing, marriage founded on respect and friendship are far more apt to turn out happily than the one where only the fleeting feeling of the moment is considered. You may trust what I say, my child," he added benignly; "all my knowledge of life and my study of mankind have gone to confirm my opinion on this point."

Amaryllis sat quite still.

"I am not going to marry him," she said.

Anger convulsed his features. He raised his eyebrows and glared at her out of wide-open eyes.

"I never thought that I should have to be *ashamed*—yes, ashamed of my daughter," he said. "I never thought that my child would act dishonourably."

"Father," said Amaryllis, "when I told Sir Roger that I did not love him sufficiently to marry him, I also told him of what had brought me to understand my own feelings."

"And what was that?" he snorted.

She stood up.

"It was knowing about *you* and *mother*. That woke me up like a noise, and made me see everything differently."

Frank became livid; all his facial muscles seemed suddenly to collapse.

"*What!*"

Amaryllis slipped down on her knees by Henrietta.

"Mother! Mother!" she whispered. "I did not say *what* you did! I only said—*something!*"

There was a profound silence, and then Mr Gordon Smythe gave utterance to an oath so forcible that Mrs Goulburn leapt to her feet.

"Frank!" she exclaimed.

He turned round upon her.

"Oh, of course it was your doing! I know that," he said in a low voice of virulent hatred. "I might

have guessed that if there was any damage to be done, *you* would do it. The mere fact that an innocent girl was happy was enough to set *your* infernal tongue busy."

He looked at her as if he would strike her; then he glanced at the slight form of his daughter as she knelt by her mother's bedside. He eyed Jessie again as if uncertain what to do, and again glanced at Amaryllis. Then, with another half-articulate curse, he strode across to the door.

There he stopped. He turned round with a sudden resolution.

"No," he said, "I shall *not* go!"

He came back to where Jessie was standing.

"It is *you* who shall go! You shall not sleep another night under my roof! You, who have made mischief, who came on purpose to make mischief in your most conscientious manner. Leave me with my wife and child! Our child whom you have tried to alienate from both of us! It is quite true that I broke the law once, but upon my honour I would rather have that against me—yes, and the stigma of imprisonment, too—than act as you have done now, with underhand means, making a treacherous use of your knowledge. Amaryllis, she has told you what I intended that you should never know, what you need never have known, what I had a right to conceal. I came to the decision that silence was not only justifiable, but imperative in the cause of right against wrong. It was the most really honest line of conduct, the fairest to you, to your mother, and to myself, and if your aunt had not taken it upon herself to interfere, the course of events would have justified me. I did not come to such a decision idly; it was the result of long and grave consideration. And do you think that these twenty years—twenty-one it is—have been

wasted? Haven't we done much as citizens to make amends for the past violation of the law? Not only have we conformed to the written and unwritten usages of society, but we have won the regard of our neighbours, and we have helped on, as every right-minded family must do, the cause of civilisation. My child, you have acted hastily. I do not blame you, because you are young and inexperienced, and your impetuosity has brought its own punishment. I *am* disappointed that you did not come to me, your natural guide and adviser. Much distress and unnecessary unhappiness might have been avoided if you had not thought, as you are too apt to do, that you are competent to judge. As to you, Henrietta! My poor darling, I don't reproach you. I quite see all you have suffered at the hands of your unnatural sister. I *now* understand your illness. But you should have sent for me at once. You should not have left me in ignorance for one minute. Surely it was a matter for *me* to deal with.

Henrietta, who had been watching him, with a dawning light of relief in her eyes suddenly held out her arms.

"O Frank! O Frank! I was wrong! Dear Frank, forgive me!"

Amaryllis started up, and stepped aside, as her father approached the bed and bent down to kiss his wife.

Jessie and Amaryllis looked at each other.

"Good-bye, my child!" said Mrs Goulburn abruptly.

"You aren't going?" exclaimed Amaryllis in dismay.

"I shall turn up again," said Jessie. "After all—your mother is your mother, though, unfortunately your father will always be your father."

"Don't go," said Amaryllis.

"Come with me," said Jessie tenderly.

But Amaryllis shook her head. Her aunt kissed her and left the room.

Amaryllis crossed to the window and stood there looking out. A bleak evening; a sky covered with muddled grey clouds; bare black trees swaying in the wind; a wide, deserted road, pallid in the dim light.

Presently the front door banged. Mrs Goulburn, in her long tweed coat and felt hat, carrying her small bag, went along the paved path to the gate. The gate squeaked on its hinges as she went through, and she started to walk along the road towards Hadbury.

Then Amaryllis glanced back into the room. It was nearly dark, but the firelight shone on the foot of the bed, and on her father's figure as he sat beside Henrietta, leaning forward towards her, one arm resting on the counterpane. Her mother was in the shadow, all but one slim white wrist and hand which lay against his arm, the fingers idly plucking at the thick black material. Mr Gore-Smythe was talking to her in a low, persuasive voice.

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PART III

ONE morning eight months later three letters came for Mrs Goulburn by the second post.

She was in the room that she had set aside for what she called messing, and was busy altering the trimming on a frock of Kitty's when the maid brought her the letters. The frock was on a dress-making figure, and Jessie was standing in front of pinning folds of white chiffon on the bodice.

"Put them down on the table," she said to the maid, speaking inarticulately on account of a pin in her mouth. She inserted a final all-grappling pin in the end of the folds and stood back to scrutinise her work. She thought it a great improvement to the gown. Then she took up the letters, and shoving them one behind another, she looked at the handwriting: one from Henrietta, one from Amaryllis and one—why, who was that from? It was not a handwriting she knew at all.

She opened it and uttered an exclamation. She dropped it and hastily opened Amaryllis's letter and glanced at that. Then taking them all up into her hand, she went quickly out of the room, ran down the stairs, and burst into Dick's study, where he was seated at the writing-table, large account books open all round him.

"My dear Dick!" she cried, her face flushed with pleasure. "Such good news! Do read that!"

He wheeled round on his chair and took the letter she held out to him.

"DEAR MRS GOULBURN,—I told her I didn't care
a damn, hence I sign myself your affectionate nephew,
"KENNETH RODWELL."

"Dear me!" said Dick, rubbing his red hair which was now plentifully mixed with grey. "The young man she sent to you the other day to be posted up in facts? He expresses himself lucidly."

Jessie laughed, and seated herself on the arm of a big leather chair close to him.

"Of course," she said, "I'm not really surprised. I felt sure she would not have wanted him to know if she had not suspected something more than friendship."

"Henrietta will be happy," remarked Dick. "It will almost console her for having to leave Hadbury. Have they accomplished the move yet?"

Jessie looked at Amaryllis's letter.

"No, she still writes from Hadbury," she said. "Poor child! How happy she is!"

"Lord, but she must have had an entertaining summer, travelling about with Frank and Henrietta!" remarked Dick grimly. "Can't you imagine them on the Continent?"

Jessie did not hear, or rather she heard but did not attend. She was absorbed in reading Amaryllis's letter to the end. Suddenly she laughed, and she finished it with a smile on her lips.

"It's charming!" she said, handing it to him; "and so like her!"

She opened the third envelope and, extracting Henrietta's letter, she and Dick simultaneously looked up with an exclamation.

"Bless my soul!" he said, "so *she* proposed to him, did she?"

"That's what made me laugh," said Jessie; "but, Dick, do you know, Henrietta is seriously shocked

about it. She really is; and so is Frank. They are pleased at the engagement, but she says that their pleasure is necessarily damped by the discovery that their daughter could do such a thing! And she begs that we will mention it to no one."

Dick held out his hand for Mrs Gore-Smythe's letter. He chuckled as he read it. He ruffled his hair, and chuckled again. Then he looked up with twinkling blue eyes.

"Of course," he said gravely, "I can quite see that such a breach of decorum would pain them considerably. I wonder she could bring herself to mention it even to you, Jessie."

"Oh, she knew Amaryllis would tell me," said Jessie.

"Still, I hope," he went on, "I hope that in time they may be able to overlook it. What do you think?"

Jessie laughed, and then sighed.

"Poor Henrietta!" she said. "I can't think how she came to have a daughter like Amaryllis!"

THE END

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